- Is your doctor a pervert?
- How powerbrokers like Brent Scowcroft broke the National Bank of Washington
- Nick Lemann on Pat Moynihan's fatal flaw

The Washington Monthly

MAY 1991/$3.50

PRETTY WORTHLESS

Whatever happened to making movies that make a difference?

by Beth Austin

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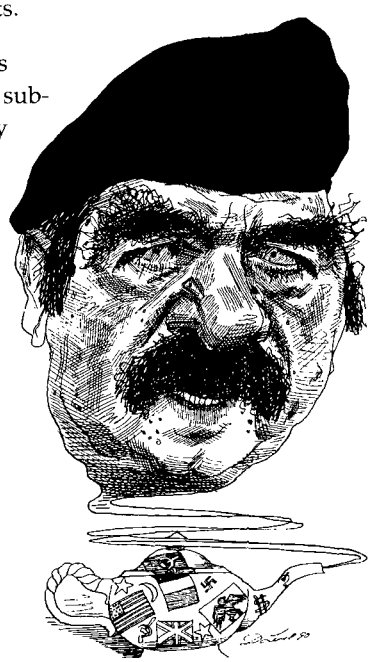

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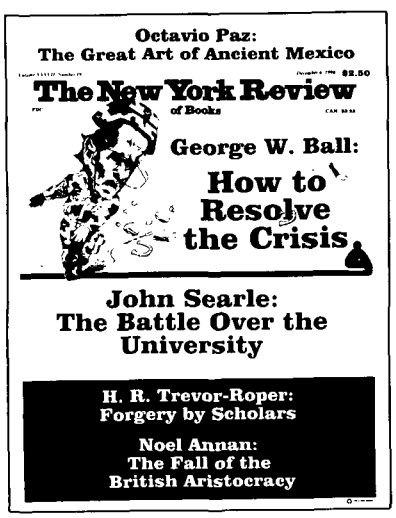

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Volume Twenty-Three, Number 5 May 1991

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LETTERS

Oil habits die hard

Peter Gray's recent article, "Kicking the Oil Habit" [March], echoes what I've been saying for months.

When it comes to reaping the transportation benefits of compressed natural gas, we're pretty much chasing our own tail. Consumers aren't switching to vehicles run on compressed natural gas because Detroit isn't producing them. . . . Detroit isn't producing them because there's no refueling infrastructure in place. . . . There's no refueling infrastructure because there's not a market of compressed natural gas vehicles. . . .

The federal government should get the ball rolling by converting 500,000 of its vehicles to compressed natural gas. What's more, they should quit buying gasoline-powered cars completely after 1991.

If we can send 500,000 troops to the desert in a matter of months, surely we can convert 500,000 vehicles to compressed natural gas in a year.

T. BOONE PICKENS
Dallas, Texas

I realize that Peter Gray's article in the March issue was about converting our automobile fleet to a less harmful fuel source and not about alternative forms of transportation, but with a title like "Kicking the Oil Habit," you could have at least mentioned the word bicycle somewhere in the article. Good piece, though.

KEVIN KEEFE
Washington, D.C.

Too generally speaking

What on earth happened to the following conversation that should have taken place in Charles Peters's office, oh, about three months ago?

Scott Shuger: So Charlie, what about my proposed article on press coverage of generals for March?

Charles Peters: Scott, this magazine made its reputation on *showing* other journalists how to write stories—how to dig out information, ask penetrating questions, get answers, analyze. We're not about to stop short at *telling* them what to do. Your criticisms of press coverage are good ones, and I'll write them into a short intro for the piece you are going to write—an in-depth analysis of Schwarzkopf, Powell, et al., and what their strengths, weaknesses, backgrounds, experiences, etc., may mean for Desert Storm.

Besides, I'm going to be commenting in my March column about Gulf reporters hiding out in cushy hotels. It wouldn't look good to have the lead article in the same issue written from your desk without any leg work except the collection of a few articles from other publications.

Shuger: Good points, Charlie. And I'd better stock up on groceries. That CentCom base in Florida probably doesn't have a decent restaurant.

ANN BJORK
Seattle, Washington

In the informative and intelligent article by Scott Shuger, "General Failure" [March], the statement is made that in the past decade, there have been no articles on generals or admirals in *The New Yorker* or *Esquire*. I do not know about *Esquire*, which I only read at the dentist's.

But in *The New Yorker* of October 6, 1986, there is a profile of Rear Admiral (Retired) Gene R. LaRocque, director of the Center for Defense Information in Washington, which at some length describes his strong effort for peace. The article also mentions some of his colleagues, retired admirals and generals, who have taken bold positions against excessive military spending and for improving the state of the nation and world without wars.

The profile was written by the undersigned. Mention should also be made of the strong Notes and Comment pieces in *The New Yorker*'s Talk of the Town section, which over the years have taken sane stands against military adventurism.

HERBERT MITGANG
New York, New York

The author replies:

I am sorry I missed Mr. Mitgang's article in the course of preparing the piece. *The New Yorker*'s library informed us that the magazine had not run any articles on generals in the past 10 years.

Scientific reasoning

I am not sure how or why David Hamilton ["Trivia Pursuit," March] picked my article for his slam at bad science. He has cited the four-year-old "Securing the Middle Ground: Reporter Formulas in '60 Minutes' " as an example of silly social science. Unfortunately, it is not a social science article; it is a critical article belonging to a humanities-based research tradition. And, as with much humanities work, it certainly was not funded by the government or the private sector. Hamilton has violated at least one tenet of basic journalism instruction that I have always taught my University of Michigan reporting students: "If you get the little stuff wrong, who's going to believe you on the big issues?"

Still, I agree with many of Hamilton's observations, especially regarding the inaccessibility of much academic writing and the devaluation of teaching at research universities. But there is something about the smugness (Hamilton would call it common sense) of a *Science* reporter who, in a mere seven-page tour de force, has the "expertise" to indict bad academic research in everything from news and myth, NASA, immunology, psychology, sociology, mathematics, literature, ergonomics, botany, anesthesiology, and all 138 journals of economics. No academic I know would claim such scope. But, then, academics don't usually live in the world of journalistic certainty.

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I suppose that for many of us, it's a comfort to know things are finally reducible to titles, numbers, and the common-sense world of David Hamilton. If, as Hamilton claims, "80 percent of scientific literature [is] nonsense" and "90 percent of anything is crap," may we assume that this is true of magazine journalism as well?

RICHARD CAMPBELL
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Reviewing the reviewer

I don't expect *The Washington Monthly* to endorse my views, but I appreciated that your reviews of my previous books were seriously done and reflected a careful reading. That care was lamentably lacking in Jonathan Rauch's recent travesty ["Booknotes," March], which purported to be a review of *The End of Laissez-Faire*.

My book had a core argument never acknowledged in the review—namely that America's obsession with laissez-faire as a principle for global economics is directly related to Pax Americana. The U.S. tends to view the global market as an extension of its own, which often hurts American industry. To hear Rauch tell it, my book was mainly an attack on laissez-faire in domestic policy. As it happens, I wrote that book in 1984—*The Economic Illusion*. Rauch also misuses the phrase "New View," which has been widely used to describe the technical critique of comparative advantage by economist Paul Krugman and others. Rauch, erroneously, has me using "New View" to mean economic planning.

This review gives every indication that the reviewer skimmed, rather than read, the book. He has every right to dislike the book, but he should do his homework. Let me tell you, writing a book is a lot of work. Authors, and your readers, deserve better.

ROBERT KUTTNER
Brookline, Massachusetts

J'accuse

Your constant sniping at Israel has been a source of disgust to me. It has finally culminated in the awarding of your journalism prize to Mike Wallace for his biased presentation of the Temple Mount incident [March]. It was a holy day and there *were* worshippers at the wall! There are always worshippers at the wall, even when there is no holy day.

May I suggest that you switch your venom to India, where 3,000 were killed in six weeks over a holy site claimed by both Moslems and Hindus? Or for a diversion you might point your soiled finger at Peru or Tibet or Botswana, or maybe even Liberia.

During the thirties, *Time* magazine always referred to Henry Morgenthau, the distinguished secretary of the treasury, as "Jew Morgenthau." My mother, an early subscriber, finally wrote to *Time* and simply said, "Jew Lehman cancels her subscription." In my own generation, I follow in her indignant footsteps and say to you and your magazine, "Jew Emanuel cancels her subscription."

FELICE L. EMANUEL
Las Vegas, Nevada

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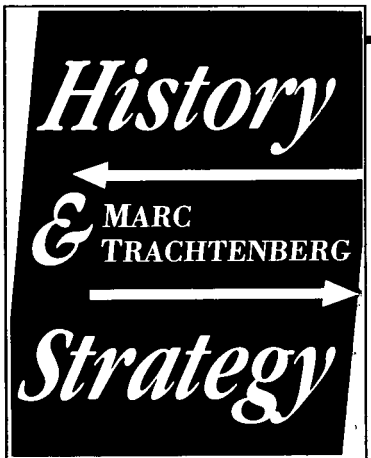

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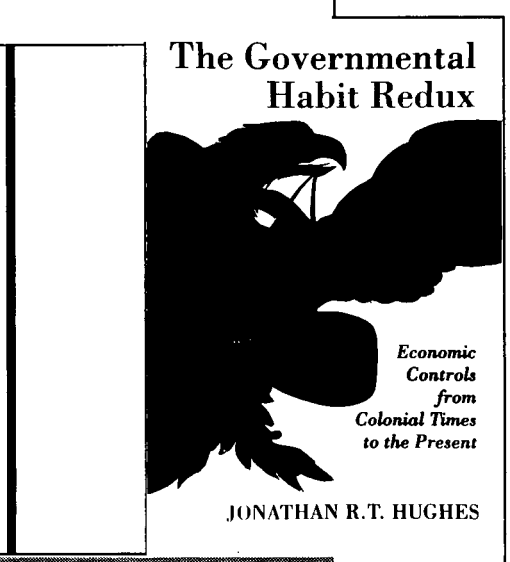

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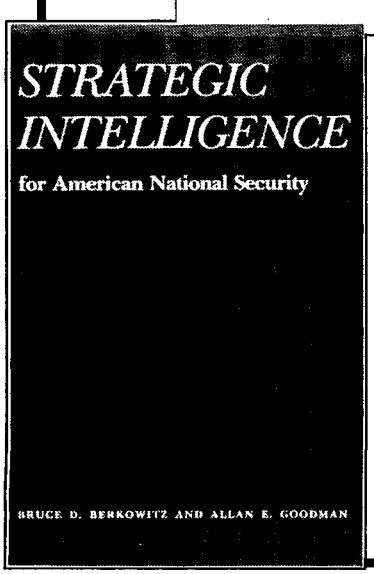

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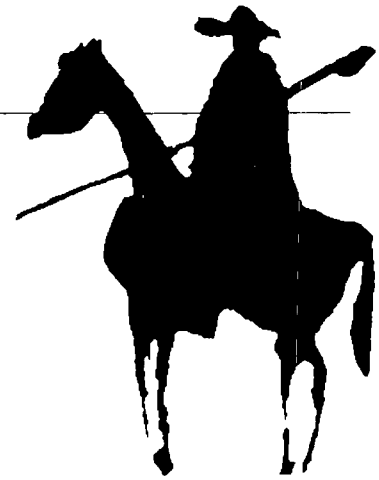

Last month, we noted how the Gulf war filled the entertainment gap between the Super Bowl and the beginning of baseball season. Apparently NFL Films feels the same way. It is producing a 60-minute documentary about Operation Desert Storm. Highlights of the war will be displayed in what Michael Silver, the California reporter to whom I'm indebted for the story, describes as "a lush production, featuring orchestral music, declassified military footage, and a booming-voiced narrator." Lt. Colonel Steve Titunick, who heads the Pentagon's broadcast pictorial branch, told Silver he would screen the film before its release "to make sure it portrays the DOD in a positive light." . . .

With such exciting entertainment available, it is not hard to understand why one panel at the American Society of Magazine Editors' conference last month was devoted to "Running Socially Relevant Issues: How Much Can Readers Take?" . . .

Amidst the many intriguing aspects of the Pamela Smart case, one that may have escaped your attention is the job she held at that New Hampshire school: media service administrator. The title does suggest a schedule allowing ample time for fooling around, doesn't it? The unfortunate fact is that the American public schools are loaded with such job titles—see Michael Willrich's article on page 24—and while their holders may fill their free time with behavior less exotic than Smart's, it's a pretty good bet that their working hours are similarly unrelated to serious learning. . . .

Wouldn't the Gulf war, a reporter asked, be good to feature in recruiting ads since it was quick, decisive, even flashy? No, replied Colonel John Myers, director of advertising and public affairs for the Army Recruiting Command:

"You've got to be careful how combat, or the potential for combat, is displayed in your commercials. We don't want to be misleading, but too much combat footage interferes with the long-term attributes of Army service that we want to portray: money for college, skills training, and relevance to a civilian career." . . .

To influence the American public, reports *The Washington Post*'s Gary Lee, Kuwait spent more than $11 million "employing three U.S. public relations firms, dozens of imagemakers, a team of lawyers, and a squad of Washington lobbyists." Eight million dollars went to Hill and Knowlton. As a result, my old friend Frank Mankiewicz notes, Kuwaiti officials "got a lot better at dealing with the press." Mankiewicz is such a master of his art that I have to suspect that he is the one who soaked that poor bird in Uniflo and called the photographers.

One reporter Frank didn't get to in time is Bob Drogin of the *Los Angeles Times*, who has revealed—much of his story was later confirmed by *The New Republic*—that while war-ravaged Kuwait City was without electricity and running water and there was growing desperation among its newly liberated people, 400 workers were laboring 16 hours a day on the "sumptuous restoration" of the emir's palace. Hundreds of gold-plated French bathroom fixtures and doorknobs have been installed.

"Moroccan tiles have been cleaned and repaired. Silk brocade has been hung on the walls. Water runs hot and cold.

"Mahogany tables have been shined, plush carpets cleaned, silk pillows arranged on brand new sitting room sofas."

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But the Kuwaiti in charge of the restoration notes that even though he has been assisted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which—can you believe this—gave the project top priority, he still has a problem:

"We can't find enough bulbs for the chandeliers. And every room has one." . . .

ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN are pooling coverage of the White House so that the number of camera crews assigned to Bush's daily schedule will be reduced from four to one. One would hope the rest of the media would see the beauty of this idea and leave coverage of staged events at the White House to a single camera crew and a couple of wire service reporters, thereby freeing scores of high-quality journalists to go after important stories instead of sitting in the White House press room, lapping up what the administration wants them to hear. . . .

When Dickie Conn got a tax bill for $1 billion, she called the IRS to say that it must be a typographical error. A clerk told her she'd have to resolve it in court. But after a news report of the case had been printed, the IRS conceded the amount was wrong. One IRS official told *The San Jose Mercury News* that it was "the largest dollar error" he had seen in 15 years at the agency.

But if the IRS looked bad in this case, it looked heroic in rejecting White House efforts to make it target audits on the middle class instead of on wealthy individuals and corporations. I would, however, caution Fred Goldberg, the IRS commissioner who took the brave stand, that as he proceeds down Washington's bureaucratic alleyways, he take care to cast frequent glances to the rear, lest a knife be inserted in his back. White House officials seldom react cheerfully to having an underling like Goldberg show them up.

George Bush himself is still angry at the IRS, according to David Ellis and Sidney Urquhart of *Time*, because of a 1984 audit that made him pay nearly $200,000 in taxes, interest, and penalties. . . .

One District of Columbia policeman has been paid $178,096 over the past two years in salary and overtime pay. Another has received $181,509. What kind of protection from crime have the citizens of Washington been given in return for such generous compensation? A clue is that one of the officers made only three arrests during the period; the other made none. . . .

For years, banks have been wasting money on overly generous dividends to their owners—money that should have gone to increasing their capital and the reserves needed to cover the many bad loans they've been making. This has been a significant factor in the current banking crisis. Yet, incredibly enough, the FDIC does not have the power to require banks to cut their dividends, even though those excessive dividends could obligate the taxpayers to finance a bailout of the guilty bank. . . .

Would you like to be treated like a movie star? Well, believe it or not, there's a California company called Entertainment Express that will provide two women to act as if they are the president and vice president of your fan club and a photographer to pursue you with camera clicking and bulb flashing. Three hundred dollars an hour pays for the entire package. . . .

Here are Lee Atwater's last words about his decade:

"The eighties were about acquiring—acquiring wealth, power, prestige. I know, I acquired more wealth, power, and prestige than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty. It took a deadly illness to put me eye to eye with that truth, but it is a truth that the country, caught up in its ruthless ambitions and moral decay, can learn on my dime." God bless and keep you, Lee. I detested your politics. But your last words couldn't have been better. . . .

Pat Moynihan is one of those men whose virtues are so great that those of us who admire them find it hard to face the facts that Nicholas Lemann recounts in this issue (page 39). Although I am convinced that Lemann is right, I think it's important for us to pay due honor to Moynihan's good side, one expression of which is his excellent work on international law, which we praised in a book review last year. Another is his championing of the cause of social security tax relief for the working poor and the lower middle class, an ancient cause of the *Monthly* that Moynihan was the first prominent politician to embrace. Perhaps Lemann's article will make Moynihan mad enough to show us up by actually sticking with the cause of social security tax relief until he gets it enacted. . . .

I am happy to report that another *Monthly* cause, Cheap Chic, seems, in contrast to our campaign for social security fairness, to have met with almost instant acceptance in American homes. *Time* magazine has been among the first to recognize the sea change that is taking place, publishing a major article on the

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subject last August and a cover story last month that notes, among other evidence, that BMW sales are down 28 percent from 1985 levels. "Tired of trendiness and materialism," *Time* writes, "Americans are rediscovering the joys of home life, basic values, and things that last."

The one element of this trend that does not absolutely delight us is its focus on home and children, which, while in many respects sane and healthy, can also involve a dangerous denial of and escape from responsibility to the broader community. We explore this danger in Beth Austin's article on movies on page 30. . . .

One publication that does not seem to have embraced Cheap Chic is *Money* magazine, which is now advertising that it "covers everything from renting an Italian villa to commissioning a family portrait." . . .

Another place the Cheap Chic message does not appear to have enjoyed overwhelming success is in the executive suites of corporate America. Executive pay continued to rise in 1990 despite the recession and despite the fact that profits were declining. The gap between what the average worker is paid and what the average CEO gets—the latter's salary is often 75 or 80 times that of the worker—doubled in the past 15 years. And it was already greater than in most industrial countries, and much greater than in our major rival, Japan. As an article in the *Harvard Business Review* points out: "Corporate America pays its most important leaders like bureaucrats." In other words, they get automatic annual raises without regard to performance. They win even though their companies are losing.

"Is it any wonder," the authors ask, "that so many CEOs act like bureaucrats rather than the value-maximizing entrepreneurs companies need to enhance their standings in world markets?" . . .

While we keep wasting money on executive salaries, the Japanese are spending 28 percent of their GNP—*twice* what we do—on new plants and research. . . .

As the quality of American products seemed in steady, almost relentless decline in recent years, one of the few exceptions was the Steinway piano, which retained by virtue of its excellence a near-monopoly on the concert stage. But now the company appears to have taken the suicide pill of choice in modern American industry. It has selected a Harvard MBA to run its factory. He has demonstrated his lifelong commitment to making great pianos by training as a quality control engineer in the nuclear power industry and by serving as manager of strategic planning and development at General Electric. . . .

How can we stop police brutality? One way that is increasingly advocated by reformers is to have a civilian review board staffed with civilian investigators. As things stand now, complaints of police brutality are all too often evaluated by friends and associates of the accused. In New York City, 39 of 50 investigators are police officers.

The civilian review board solution seems so obvious that I hope it will be extended to other boards charged with investigating professional misconduct, especially those of lawyers and doctors, whose instincts for self-protection are so finely honed. Of course, the civilian boards must not consist of fools and patsies—which is why I have long advocated having lawyers serve on medical licensing boards and doctors on lawyers'. After all, the two groups are acutely aware of one another's deficiencies.

In the case of physicians, the fair but tough reviews of their performance that would deprive the incompetents of their licenses could make it possible to at last get rid of the malpractice suits that run up insurance and medical costs. Malpractice claims could be handled on a no-fault basis with compensation for medical expenses and loss of earnings but not for infinitely inflatable damages for pain and suffering. This common-sense approach has been made impossible by the doctors' insistence on controlling

HONORARIA SCORECARD 1990

As part of a story last year criticizing journalists for not disclosing their honoraria, the *Monthly* promised to annually reveal all speaking fees received by its editorial staff. Here's 1990's installment. Editor in Chief Charles Peters earned $5,050 in honoraria for speaking before the following groups:

Delacorte Lecture, Columbia University ($3,000)

Northern Arizona University ($1,500)

Eligibility Workers Association ($250)

Paul Miller Fellowship, Gannett Foundation ($200)

American University ($100)

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their own licensing, which means there is no effective discipline for misconduct by a physician other than the malpractice suit. . . .

One practice that we cannot trust either the doctors or the lawyers to monitor is tax-deductible travel, to which the two professions are both devoted. The latest development in this field is an organization called the American Educational Institute, which offers doctors, lawyers, and dentists tax-deductible travel to their choice of 31 exotic locations around the world from St. Thomas to Eleuthera to Maui to Acapulco to Sun Valley and Aspen. The subjects offered at the seminars include such clear enhancers of professional competence as:

➤"The common billing practices which greatly increase your chances of being audited by Medicare and insurance companies."

➤"The relationship between the Federal Anti-Kickback statutes and the Safe Harbor regulations." . . .

A fact about the Stanford scandal that may have escaped your attention: While the university was billing the U.S. government overhead charges—on research contracts—for such items as $7,000 custom sheets for the school president's bed and $45,000 for a trustees' junket to Lake Tahoe, it was waiving overhead charges on similar contracts with large corporations and the Japanese government. . . .

Speaking of stupidity in spending, ponder for a moment the billions we have squandered on the B-1 and B-2 bombers and then face the fact that in the percentage of infants immunized against measles, we now rank *behind* the following nations: Panama, Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, Chile, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Cuba, Honduras, Antigua, Barbados, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Colombia, St. Lucia, Uruguay, Belize, Nicaragua, Turks and Caicos, Brazil, Paraguay, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Suriname. The list would be much longer if, as you have probably guessed, it wasn't confined to the Western Hemisphere. What happened was that between 1981 and 1991, the Reagan and Bush administrations increased the immunization budget only half the amount needed to cover costs. . . .

Is Petersstan the answer? Should the staff of this magazine, fed up with America's failure to heed our wisdom, barricade the doors and proclaim a new nation established on the fourth floor of 1611 Connecticut Avenue and dedicated to the principles of *The Washington Monthly*?

The world hasn't gone that crazy yet, but it does seem that every day one reads of some new group threatening to break away from the nation of which it has been a part. Clearly if they all had their way, the world would be fragmented into Petersstans—a phenomenon to which Americans, with their great faith in the Union, have an instinctive aversion. But equally clearly, there are tribes around the world who feel abused and alienated. And certainly there were boundaries drawn by French and British colonialists in Africa and the Mideast that were based more on whim and bureaucratic convenience than on respect for ethnic and religious differences.

My answer to the problem is what I call the Reasonable Test. The first part of the test is fairly obvious: Is the group of reasonable size, as is the cases of the Kurds and the Lithuanians? The second part of the test concerns a matter that I'm not sufficiently informed about in regard to the Kurds and their neighbors to answer, but that is the most important question of all. Do reasonable people among the aggrieved group hate their alleged oppressors and vice versa, as, say, in the cases of the Tamils and the Sinhalese, and the Palestinians and Israeli Jews? If so, a split at least into some sort of confederation is desirable because the two parties are not destined to live happily together in any realistically foreseeable future. If, on the other hand, the hatred does not exist among the reasonable people on both sides—as in the cases of the Flemings and Walloons of Belgium, the Ashanti, Ewe, and other tribes of Ghana, and, come to think of it, the blacks and whites of America—staying together seems to be the right answer. If you have any further questions, don't hesitate to write. . . .

YOU CAN HELP

Sometimes it's easy to forget how much *The Washington Monthly* depends on its readers. Our Memos of the Month come almost entirely from you. Clippings from your local papers inspire many of the items in "Tidbits and Outrages" and "Tilting at Windmills."

Readers help us in countless other ways, calling with tips for stories, giving their friends subscriptions, or just making sure we're on the shelves of their local newsstands, libraries, and bookstores.

Thanks!

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Club Med

How the medical fraternity keeps the government from exposing the skeletons in doctors' closets

by David Greenberg

In 1978, Connie Fay Blackstone, a married Ohio woman in her mid-twenties, found herself severely depressed after the death of her mother. She turned to Dr. Leo Nierras, a psychiatrist, for help. But Nierras was a little too solicitous. During a session with Blackstone, the doctor exposed himself to her and told her, as he masturbated, that he could be both her doctor and her lover. Then he fondled and pinched the woman's breast. Nierras—earlier accused of sexually harassing his former receptionist—was convicted in 1980 of attempted sexual battery. He surrendered his license upon entering prison.

Released after serving three months, Nierras hoped to practice medicine elsewhere, but with sexual battery on his record, his chances looked slim. So when he applied for a temporary license in Missouri, Nierras lied, denying that he'd ever been convicted of a crime. The state issued the license, but the medical board eventually caught on and canceled it. Nierras then practiced psychiatry in the Philippines for two years before returning to the States, where he got lucky again with the licensing board in Pennsylvania. He now serves as a supervisor of psychiatrists at Warren State Hospital.

CBS's "60 Minutes" tells a similar story. A few years before *Roe* v. *Wade*, Barbara Seitz, a dancer in Cleveland, wanted an illegal abortion. So she went to see Vilis Kruze, a local doctor, who administered various drugs and implanted an IUD coil for $100. The result was a bloody, botched abortion. Seitz committed suicide and Kruze was jailed, eventually serving time in the Lima State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. After his release, Kruze moved to Hawaii, where Kaiser Permanente,

David Greenberg is a reporter for The New Republic.

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without investigating his past, hired him as a pediatrician. A young couple came to him to treat their four-month-old son, who'd come down with a fever. Kruze misdiagnosed the illness, which turned out to be meningitis; the delayed diagnosis permanently brain-damaged the boy. After this episode, Kruze moved to California. There, he was murdered by the brother of a woman who overdosed on drugs that Kruze gave her.

Of course, monsters like Kruze are rare. But between the Kruzes and the Marcus Welbys, there's a surprising amount of room for state-hopping quacks, each of whom theoretically has up to 50 chances to get his act together. One California surgeon, whose license was revoked when his gross negligence led to a patient's death, managed to get credentialed in Michigan. When that second license was revoked after some trouble there, he took up practice in New York City. Another doctor got licensed in Wyoming while under investigation in Michigan. Although he was eventually forced to surrender his Michigan license, Wyoming made no such demands. Soon thereafter, a patient under his care died; only then did Wyoming bar him as well. In yet another case, a Louisiana doctor was accused of sexual molestation by several patients. When investigators looked into his past, they learned he'd been denied full privileges at the Illinois hospital where he used to work because of similar complaints.

Starting to wonder if you should check up on your doctor's background? Nice idea, but good luck. In 1986, Congress tried to stop shady doctors from wiping the slate clean every time they changed their addresses. It created the National Practitioner Data Bank, a computerized storehouse of transgressions by all the nation's doctors. The idea was to make accessible violations otherwise sealed up within the medical community's brotherhood of silence. But four and a half years later, you still can't use the federally funded Data Bank to find out if your doctor has skeletons in his closet—unless you're a member of the brotherhood yourself. Indeed, any attempt by Joe Public to use the bank will draw him a stiff $10,000 fine.

Most of the blame for the public shut-out lies with the American Medical Association (AMA), which has spearheaded a relentless assault on the Data Bank. As one architect of the Data Bank legislation put it, the mighty AMA "opposed this thing every step of the way." And when the AMA talks, congressmen listen: The AMA is America's second most generous PAC. In 1990, the organization contributed money to the campaigns of 478 senators and representatives. Seventy-seven members of Congress, including Speaker Tom Foley and Republican Whip Newt Gingrich, received gifts of $10,000 or more.

One of the few who got nothing from the AMA last year was Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat who serves on the House Health and Environment Subcommittee and is a longtime advocate of medical reform. In the early eighties, concerned that peer-review panels were too weak, Wyden explored the idea of imposing some federal check upon the medical profession. In the course of his investigations, he stumbled across the state-hopping problem. According to the journal *Medical Economics*, some 25 to 30 physicians were doing it *each month*. Wyden was particularly struck by a dodge used in his home district, which bordered

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Washington state. "They could go across the border into Washington to practice, and they wouldn't even have to move," he says.

In response to concerns like Wyden's, Congress passed the 1986 Health Care Quality Improvement Act, which strengthened peer review and set up the Data Bank. Administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the National Practitioner Data Bank contains the names of all licensed doctors and dentists in the U.S. Whenever a doctor has his license suspended or revoked, loses or settles out of court in a malpractice suit, or is otherwise disciplined by a hospital or state board, that information enters the repository. Hospitals then query the bank, both to keep tabs on their regular staff (they must do so every two years) and to find out the histories of prospective employees. State licensing boards, medical societies, nursing homes, and health maintenance organizations may also use the bank.

Wyden denies that the Data Bank legislation originally called for public access. And while he's right in saying that no written draft of the bill ever included such a provision, public access was certainly part of the initial concept. "Wyden originally wanted it to be open," says Charles Inlander, president of the Allentown, Pennsylvania-based People's Medical Society. "But the AMA was the number-two PAC. Wyden knew the only way to get it passed was to keep out the public access provision."

Peter Budetti, a professor of health law and policy at George Washington University and former counsel to the Health and Environment Subcommittee, explains why the legislators cut a deal. Given the resistance of the AMA, Congress doubted the organization would let even the government see any doctors' records. "There wouldn't have been anything in the Data Bank if it were public," he says. "So there was a tradeoff." In return for the AMA's cooperation, public access was quashed.

Still, the bank in its diluted form is better than no bank at all. "There is a great benefit in the legislation right now because it puts the heat on medical providers," says Wyden. "If hospitals don't check the Data Bank and there's a problem—if they credential a physician with a serious record of violations—in a lawsuit, they're in deep trouble." But advocacy groups such as the People's Medical Society and Ralph Nader's Public Citizen contend that public access is the sine qua non of a useful Data Bank. Right now, patients must still rely on hospitals to monitor their physicians for them. And there remains no check whatsoever on doctors in private practice.

The AMA claims the average patient won't know how to interpret a black mark beside a doctor's name, so any notation will forever brand a physician as incompetent. "If a physician has his credentials suspended for failing to complete some chartwork, that goes on his record," says James Todd, senior deputy executive vice president of the AMA and a member of the Data Bank's executive committee. "This information will not be understood by the consumer."

That fear completely ignores the real issue: the effect on the patient. After all, patients maimed by incompetent doctors will suffer far more than doctors who lose business because of spotty records. Besides, the average citizen can distinguish between grave and minor offenses.

"If you see that your physician got disciplined for turning in his Medicare forms late, you're still going to go to him," says Inlander. "If you see he's settled 28 lawsuits in a period of two years, you're going to want to find out more."

Malpractice assurance

Once Congress passed the legislation creating the Data Bank, many thought it would be functioning within a matter of months. Those hopes were quickly dashed. "Congress appropriated no money until the fall of 1988," says Daniel Cowell, director of quality assurance at HHS. "I don't know why. It had been my naive assumption that when Congress passes a law, the money goes along with it."

Part of the delay was caused by the budget crunch: As federal spending straits tightened, the Data Bank, with few advocates in Congress, was squeezed. Noticeably, the AMA failed to throw its weight behind the effort. "We did talk to some congressmen to make sure the money was there, but there was no all-out push when it came to getting funds," says Todd of the AMA. "We had mixed emotions about it from day one." Not too mixed: The AMA lobbied key appropriations committee members to withhold Data Bank funds.

Besides the matter of funding, several other kinks had to be worked out before the bank was up and running. The AMA, which once planned to run the bank itself, pulled out. Then came a lengthy bidding process, as HHS looked for another organization to man the system. After finally awarding the contract to the Unisys Corporation, HHS next had to haggle with OMB over guidelines for running the Data Bank.

At long last, the Data Bank opened last September 1. Requests and information immediately poured in. According to Lynn Trible, a spokeswoman at HHS, the bank recorded almost 9,000 malpractice payments and "adverse action reports" in the first five months of operation. Meanwhile, hospitals have made

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285,000 queries about employees and candidates. Thirteen thousand new ones roll in every week.

This enormous volume has surprised everyone involved. Because Unisys initially understaffed the project, there is a huge backlog now. Rather than processing requests within a few days, it is taking a whole month to answer them. Both sides are frustrated. "A month behind is really significant," says Ingrid van Tuinen, a staff researcher at Public Citizen. "It sounds like a total disaster." Todd at the AMA gripes that the backlog has delayed some physicians in acquiring their credentials at new hospitals.

A pound of prevention

Of course, delayed credentials aren't the only reason that the AMA is now busy trying to soften the Data Bank's rules. In a concession to the association, Congress included in the 1986 legislation a provision calling for a review of the bank after no more than two years to weigh various changes in the system. The AMA has been pushing to impose a $30,000 threshold for reporting malpractice settlements and judgments. Under that $30,000 figure, all claims will be dismissed as "nuisance suits" and ignored. It argues that a money-hungry patient can sue a perfectly competent doctor, and the doctor, rather than slug it out in court, will settle for a small sum. Small settlements, it says, should not discredit those doctors. In its own records of doctors' performances, predictably, the AMA does not list malpractice suits.

The AMA hopes to doctor Data Bank information in other ways as well. At its December meeting, it recommended that the government allow physicians to attach personal explanations to the official accounts of their misdeeds; to leave out certain cases in which doctors have their hospital privileges suspended; and to empty the bank of all information except license revocations every five years. "If nothing has happened to a physician in five years, then why should that mark continue to be there?" asks Todd. The reason the AMA chose a span of five years, Todd says, was "arbitrary."

Meanwhile, as a recent lawsuit against D.C. obstetrician Kenneth Blank and the Columbia Hospital for Women suggests, doctors are already finding Data Bank loopholes they can leap through. In 1989, a Maryland woman charged that Blank's negligence during the birth of her son damaged his brain and eventually killed him. Before the case went to trial, the doctor's lawyer offered the following deal: He'd settle for $485,000—but only if the doctor's name was dropped from the suit (leaving the hospital the sole defendant). In other words, the woman's lawyer charged, Blank would settle only if his name wasn't on documents that might wind up in the Data Bank.

Frustrated, the mother intended to report Blank to the Data Bank herself. But before Blank's lawyer would mail the settlement check, he asked her to sign one last agreement—which specifically forbade her from reporting her doctor to the bank. After the woman's lawyer went public, the offending clause was deleted.

Of course, just having the freedom to turn a doctor in doesn't mean the Data Bank will listen. Lauren Lubow, case control officer of the Ohio State Medical Board, says that when she called Data Bank staff members to tell them about certain incompetent doctors she'd learned of, they said they weren't interested.

Public Citizen's Lynn Soffer, who serves on the Data Bank's executive committee, predicts that it will take several years before the bank has any clout. But real clout won't come from time alone. It will come when Congress opens the Data Bank up to the average consumer. "We get letters every week from citizens who ask why they can't have access to that information," says Cowell. Both Inlander and Sidney Wolfe, the head of Public Citizen's Health Research Group, say Wyden has promised to introduce public access legislation soon. Wyden himself will say only that he wants to see the Data Bank running cleanly under its current regulations before modifying it. He wants time, he says, to work out the software glitches.

Software glitches? "I think that mechanical stuff is a lot of hooey," says Inlander. "If everyone's driver's license can be on file so that any cop in any part of the country can go to his car and call it up, then they can do this, too." Indeed, it's time to stop screwing around with what could be a life-saving public resource.

Still, the Data Bank won't shine a light into every grimy corner of the medical profession. Just last year at a Virginia hospital, for example, an alcoholic surgeon was regularly drinking on the job. His peers knew about it, even a representative of the local medical board knew about it, but no one reported it. Finally, his colleagues privately forced the man to get treatment. The man's patients, it seems, had no need to know.

Overcoming the medical profession's impulse to protect its own will require deeper reform than any computer system could possibly achieve. But making the Data Bank accessible to us all is one obvious way to start sorting out the Kruzes from the Welbys. Until they come up with a way to wipe out the disease, the AMA and its congressional co-conspirators should at least make it possible for the rest of us to battle the symptoms. □

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WHO'S WHO

Who's Who, eager to join in the *Washington-Monthly*-Goes-to-Hollywood spirit of this issue, brings you this report from **David Lauter** of the *Los Angeles Times* on how the White House press corps would cast *Bush: The Movie*. The selections: "**Danny DeVito** would be a natural as Bush's short, pudgy, and quarrelsome chief of staff, **John H. Sununu**. **Ricky Schroeder** would be adorable as ever-boyish Vice President **Dan Quayle. Carol Burnett** has been widely touted for the State Department spokeswoman **Margaret Tutwiler**. And **Anthony Hopkins**, fresh from his role as a psychotic killer in *Silence of the Lambs*, would seem unbeatable as Bush's silky smooth, ruthlessly cold and efficient secretary of state, **James A. Baker III**." . . .

Those who do not understand the ethical confusion manifested by Senator **David Durenberger** in recent years might ponder what his chief of staff, **Rick Evans**, recently said when asked if he saw any impropriety in asking lobbyists to contribute to a fund to pay the senator's legal bills:

"There's no connection between their lobbying work and the money that they contribute." . . .

And those who do not understand how the Senate's millionaires are different from the rest of us might consider this remark by the wealthy **John Seymour**, recently appointed to fill the unexpired term of **Pete Wilson**:

"Government has got to do to itself what you and I have to do as citizens. You have so much money, and you have to make hard decisions. . . . [M]aybe you've got to sell your boat to keep the family going." . . .

Insiders say the explanation to Washington's most puzzling mystery—why George Bush deserted the Kurds and other Iraqi dissidents after urging them to rebel and threatening on March 19 to shoot down Iraqi helicopters that fired on them—is that at meetings at Camp David March 21 and 22, **Turgut Ozal**, the president of Turkey, told Bush that the possibility of a Kurdistan was too much for him to swallow. When a reporter asked him after the meeting if he would permit an independent Kurdish state, Ozal replied, "No, I have said no." According to these insiders, who point to Tiananmen Square, Bush will overlook almost anything for a loyal ally. . . .

Urbane Pentagon spokesman **Pete Williams** managed to blame U.S. servicemen for doing exactly what the Pentagon said they should do when he told reporters that some troops were failing to carry out orders to accept Iraqi soldiers surrendering at the Kuwaiti border. In fact, several days after field commanders issued the order to accept Iraqi POWs, the Pentagon was insisting that U.S. forces were not supposed to accept them. . . .

According to *The Jackson* (Tennessee) *Sun*, **Lamar Alexander**, the new education secretary, "wants to send his children to an expensive private school in Washington." . . .

In 1989, following the Reagan administration conflicts of interest involving aides **Lyn Nofziger** and **Mike Deaver**, congressional Democrats and the White House leaped at the chance to tighten ethics rules governing former federal officials. Now, George Bush's counsel, **C. Boyden Gray**, Senator **George Mitchell**, and Rep. **Richard Gephardt** agree that they went too far and intend to relax the law. The reason? The realization that the new statute bars all top aides not only from lobbying their former bosses for a full year after resigning, but also from representing their interests. One potential violator would be RNC Chairman **Clayton Yeutter**, who stepped down as agriculture secretary last winter. Members of Congress, who often put their top staff members in campaign jobs, also would be forced to abide by the one-year rule. . . .

Bob Strauss, the self-styled Republicrat, used the Los Angeles police brutality case as his source of inspiration in a prepared speech to the Gridiron Club—in a joke that, at the last minute, he excised: "I come from a town in Texas that's so small, you get pulled over and only get beat up by one cop." . . .

Secretary of State Baker, unwilling to be outdone by the other guy's material, ordered spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler to phone Strauss for a facsimile of the jokes the fellow Texan intended to deliver at the annual Gridiron Dinner. . . .

Insiders have long been entertained by the games **Bob Woodward** plays with *The Washington Post*. Although he is a longtime *Post* employee, Woodward persists in writing books that contain news he withheld from the paper. This, of course, tends to irritate the Grahams, but since Woodward is such a star, they are reluctant to crack down on him. What the parties seem to have settled on is finding fig leaves to cover up Woodward's transgressions. The latest is Woodward's claim that his sources for his new book, *The Commanders*, would talk to him only on condition that no material would appear in print until the book came out. In an informal survey Who's Who made of other authors, no one could recall any source ever having made such a condition. . . .

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With Friends Like These, Who Needs Loan Officers?

With a little greed and a lot of logrolling, D.C. powerbrokers like Brent Scowcroft and Thomas Boggs destroyed the National Bank of Washington

by Lynda Edwards

The photograph shows a room with a silver chandelier and a gilded ceiling, pale light filtering through high windows, and balconies festooned with flowers. At the bottom of the photo, five thin, elderly men in frayed suits cluster together like a poorly dressed choir. One man is missing a leg, another has a scar running from his nose to his chin. In the background one can discern a laughing crowd and a banner reading "Bank of the Working Man."

The men are survivors of the Battle of Blair Mountain, a two-day war in which hundreds of poorly armed miners fought the Kentucky mineowners' private militia, which was equipped with machine guns, mortars, and even a bomber. The miners lost. But in 1949, their union, the United Mineworkers of America (UMW), was rich enough to buy the National Bank of Washington (NBW), the bank that rebuilt Washington after the War of 1812 and erected the Washington Monument a few years later. John L. Lewis, the UMW president, had the Blair Mountain survivors shipped in for good luck, to show that the bank could survive anything.

NBW did survive plenty, from the Depression to union corruption to the Latin American debt crisis. What it didn't survive was a takeover by Washington's self-dealing powerbrokers. As bank failures go, the $330 million that NBW's 1990 collapse will cost the shaky taxpayer-backed FDIC insurance fund isn't grand. Given the grim state of the economy, even the fact that 900 NBW employees lost their jobs and pensions seems to merit barely a footnote. But the story behind the NBW failure is important, because it encapsulates all that went wrong with so many banks and S&Ls during the Reagan years: From serving as a reliable, if troubled, lender to small city

Lynda Edwards is a Washington writer. Research assistance was provided by Deborah Yavelak Sieff.

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businesses, NBW was transformed into a cash cow for investors drawn from the ranks of the city elite.

Because the city in question was Washington, these investors weren't the faceless Kiwanis types you're used to seeing assailed in banking stories, but people with national influence and reputations, men like Brent Scowcroft and Thomas Boggs. These investors knew little about banking but a lot about doing favors for their friends—local developers like Conrad Cafritz and politicians like Gary Hart.

As NBW's early history demonstrates, getting a major loan from an American bank has always been as much a matter of who you know as how balanced your books are. But the Reaganauts injected two new elements into this insider culture: an almost messianic faith in growth and a disregard for oversight. NBW became one of the more than 500 banks in the past three years to overdose on this lethal mix of old and new banking attitudes, of country-club chumminess and free-market fever.

Hodges's podge

Today, the management of NBW is the subject of investigations by the FDIC, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC), and the FBI—not to mention numerous suits and counter-suits. At the center of this furor sits Luther Hodges, Jr., the bank's former CEO, ousted at the end of 1989 after the once-clubby directors—"They were my friends," Hodges emphasized in the course of several interviews—turned on each other like drowning cats in a burlap sack.

Hodges was originally recruited for the directorship of NBW by yet another friend, John Heimann, the comptroller of the currency, to rescue the bank from an earlier crisis. Back in 1980, the comptroller had taken over NBW and was investigating it for dubious director-related loans, undue influence from the UMW, and charges of director kickbacks. With his Harvard degree, a resume that included the chairmanship of the North Carolina National Bank, and a stint as Jimmy Carter's number-two man in the Commerce Department, Hodges looked like the right man to clean house. Furthermore, Hodges was a Democrat whose father, a North Carolina governor and self-made millionaire, had served as John Kennedy's commerce secretary—all of which appealed to the union, still the owner of NBW. Hodges appealed to the OCC and the Federal Reserve for a different reason: He shared the Reagan administration's vision of banking's future.

The great inflation of the late seventies sent banking—a business whose secrets to success had previously been common sense and good golf skills—into a tailspin. Depositors began deserting the banks in droves, embracing innovative investments like money market funds. By the early eighties, "deregulation and globalization" were the buzzwords of the banking industry; cutting the banks loose from the rules that used to protect them now looked like the only way to keep them alive. Wealthy customers demanded a supermarket of investment opportunities and competitive interest rates. The ultimate goal became the creation of huge regional banks linked to international financial centers. To keep up, banks began gobbling each other like candy. Meanwhile, overhead costs were increasing: A first-rate computer system, for instance, cost $150 million per year. Small banks couldn't compete. The number of independent banks fell from 12,700 in 1980 to 9,800 by 1988. Bank owners, always prosperous, were suddenly becoming very, very rich indeed.

Hodges believed that, with a little work, NBW could fit right into this new money order, not as predator but as prey. In 1980, the bank didn't look like much; in fact, to Hodges, it looked like a step down. "To tell you the truth, I would have preferred taking charge of a bigger bank," he says. "I told them I would take the position if I were paid a salary equivalent to what I would earn at a more important bank"—$400,000 per year. According to Hodges's reasoning, NBW had no hope of ever running with the big boys. "There was a limit to what the National Bank of Washington could accomplish alone. With all the work in the world, it could never be anything more than a small, efficiently run local bank."

And, with the fortunes then being made in banking, who would be satisfied with that? Hodges had a more ambitious plan: "If we cleaned it up, instituted standard loan procedures, built a good international loan department and real estate department, we could sell NBW to a big international bank, a Madrid bank, a London bank, a Japanese or Arab bank. And I was convinced that Washington would be an international financial center. Everyone was." Hodges drew up a timetable, with 1992 as the target date, for making NBW appealing to an international buyer.

The feds signed off on Hodges's goal. A 1980 OCC press release was headlined "Luther Hodges Plan[s] to Make a 21st Century Bank for the 21st Century Boom Town." It may sound nutty now, but as recently as three years ago Washington was being touted as the "next New York," a strange conceit for a one-industry town. Between 1980 and 1988, 22 cover or page-one stories appeared in the local press on the subject of the "New York-Washington-Los Angeles axis." "Mobil, MCI, and go-go real estate—where will it all end?" one 1987 lead babbled breathlessly.

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Hodges had his work cut out for him. NBW's unionized workforce, creaky computer system, and Palookaville real estate portfolio looked like liabilities to potential buyers. In 1980, the bank, which had been perhaps too conservative in its lending, had assets of $859 million, and about half its loans were at fixed rates to small borrowers. But more money and more aggressive management could change all that. Hodges set about recruiting directors who could wire him into elite Washington society—because, of course, that's where the money is.

"When you look for a board of directors," he explains, "you look for stature, reliability, character, and connections. You need men who are part of the fabric of local business activity. In Houston, you pick men who drill oil, in Detroit, men who make cars, in Milwaukee, it would be beer. Here in Washington, it's not men who build or make things, it's lawyers and real estate developers. Even though they don't know much about banking, they can bring business to the bank through their place in the world."

"These people who invested their $1 million each were my friends," says Hodges. "They invested in the bank expecting to double their money. I didn't want to disappoint them."

In addition to their status, these men shared a common goal: "They wanted to make money. . . . Yes, they were already wealthy men, but having a million or so dollars isn't that much depending on the circles you move in."

The first order of business was to buy out the mineworkers' interest in NBW. So Hodges formed a holding company and began hunting for investors, with an interesting pitch: If you put up a quarter of a million dollars, you got to be on NBW's board of directors; if you invested $1 million, you became a holding company director. Almost 50 prominent Washingtonians signed on. NBW's old boards, which featured occasional stars like Clark Clifford and True Davis, were too detached from the bank's business, ignoring, for example, the union's more dubious deals done through the bank (see "Moral Ostrichism: Blindness on a Bank Board," John Rothchild, November 1970). The new directors, anxious to get richer quick, were a little too active.

One of Hodges's first prize recruits was Bob Washington, a Marion Barry crony and chairman of the city's Democratic committee. Hodges went after Washington, who would later become his nemesis, because "this is a predominantly black city and I strongly felt that we should have a high-powered black director. Bob Washington went to Howard and Harvard. I saw his name in the Style section a lot." The two became friends. "We went to the same parties. We played tennis together."

Other elite members of Washington's two worlds—local and national affairs—signed on: Thomas Boggs, a partner in the firm Patton, Boggs, and Blow and one of Washington's best-connected lawyers; developer William Cafritz; Robert Johnson, head of Black Entertainment Television; Theodore Pedas, the president of Circle Theaters; and Delano Lewis, president of C&P Telephone. Although NBW was once called the "Democratic party's bank," Brent Scowcroft, then president of Kissinger Associates, became a very active director.

Still, Hodges hadn't raised the $70 million he needed. Then Wafic Said, a naturalized Saudi millionaire, approached Hodges and said he wanted in. Said and another Saudi, Ziad Idilby, ponied up $22.5 million, receiving in return 27 percent of the stock in the holding company and two seats on the board. After Bob Washington raised another $7 million, primarily from his partners at the law firm of Finley, Kumble, Hodges was able to buy the bank.

"These people who invested their $1 million each were my friends," says Hodges. "They invested in the bank expecting to double their money. I didn't want to disappoint them."

In the old days, NBW boards, besides the occasional celebrity director, were filled with retailers and restaurateurs, and it showed. Their annual reports were printed on cheap, shiny paper and displayed photos of the shoe shops, mechanics' garages, and mom-and-pop stores supported by NBW loans. Hodges's new board, by contrast, put out its annual reports on stationer's paper, covered with beautiful flow charts and graphics but few photos of, well, *anything*, just page after page of small type describing various high-return investment schemes.

"Commercial real estate and construction—the

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downtown office building boom, suburban hotels, luxury condos in Hillandale [in Georgetown]—and international loans," Hodges explains. "That's where the big money was, and that's where we concentrated our energies." In fewer than 10 years, Hodges and his directors doubled NBW's assets, at least on paper, to $1.6 billion. By 1988, risky international loans comprised 10 percent of NBW's loan portfolio, and unsecured loans on "risk real estate" a whopping 38 percent. Many of those loans were made to friends and associates of NBW directors.

Banklogrolling

"I was accused of selling directorships, but I still think directors should be major investors in their banks," Hodges says. That certainly makes sense. A fundamental cause of the collapse of the American banking system was the "moral hazard" posed by deposit insurance; as long as it was $500,000 in taxpayers' money Charles Keating was using to build each of the rooms of the Phoenician Hotel, how could he lose? Their pretenses to the contrary notwithstanding, most bankers were taking chances in the free market the way Clark Kent risks death by flying coach. The directors of NBW, however, had a great deal riding on their bank's success.

Remarkably, the directors still blew it; Scowcroft, for example, is out at least a million bucks. Why did they screw up? Apparently because they were all friends. According to minutes taken at directors' meetings, *not a single director voted no on any proposed loan until 1988*, when a dissident faction moved to oust Hodges. "Remember, these directors were selected because they were a certain type—well connected socially and politically, wealthy, well educated," says Kathleen Collins, former general counsel for NBW. "The real world is sort of shaped around them, and reality doesn't intrude for them the way it would for you and me." Could a director at least question a proposed loan at a board meeting? "One could," says an ex-director, "but it would be bad form."

In theory, junior loan officers would follow up on the rainmaking directors' deal proposals to make sure the fine print was in order. In practice, the employees often deferred to authority. Loan officers earning $20,000 yearly got memos or phone calls from the millionaire directors, supposedly savvy businessmen, suggesting new opportunities. Who could object? A coffee-stained cardboard folder belonging to a long-gone loan officer contains a little stack of directors' memos: "Conrad Cafritz suggests the following bit of business as a good opportunity for us. The numbers don't look that good on paper, but he predicts record returns. Look into it, see what you think. Am having lunch with CC tomorrow. Would be nice to tell him then whether or not he has a green light."

Conrad Cafritz, by the way, is the brother of William Cafritz, who you will recall was a member of NBW's board. Like several other banks, NBW often granted Cafritz unsecured loans based on nothing more than his personal guarantee—and then lent him more money to cover his interest payments. "When someone comes from a prominent, respected family, like the Cafritz family, it seems logical to assume that he will pay his debts eventually," Hodges says. Conrad Cafritz now owes $1 billion to an array of creditors, including $34.6 million in unsecured bank loans, and is trying to reorganize his debt. If he declares personal bankruptcy, those banks will have no claim on any of his properties or buildings.

Still, the credit extended to Cafritz seems reasonable compared to some of the loans NBW took a flier on:

➤In the spring of 1984, Luther Hodges's wife, Cheray, was one of the true believers backing Gary Hart's sputtering campaign for president. Hodges approved a loan to the campaign that he will describe only as "way too big." Hart lost and defaulted, handing NBW 93 Rauschenberg color lithographs to auction off instead. NBW managed to auction off 28, and the bank was stuck with a $364,000 IOU.

But, come the next campaign season, NBW was ready to put even more of its depositors' cash on the line for Hart. "By 1987, I was an enthusiastic Hart person, too," Hodges explains. Post-Donna Rice, NBW extended Hart another loan, putting the total debt at about $1 million. "We thought he'd win or repay out of his federal matching funds," Hodges says. But he didn't and wouldn't. The debts from both campaigns still stand.

➤In 1988, NBW extended an unsecured $6 million loan to a failing Louisiana bank. Why? Because NBW directors Peter Del Col and Douglas Hawes had a good friend in New Orleans who predicted a big turnaround lay just ahead. The friend just happened to be on the board of the dying bank; Del Col and Hawes just happened to be shareholders. About a year after NBW extended the loan, the bank went under.

➤NBW loaned and lost $1 million to John Coleman, the now-bankrupt Ritz-Carlton king. According to three directors, the unsecured loan was made primarily because of Coleman's friendship with NBW's major shareholder, Wafic Said. But other directors also felt they owed a debt to Coleman. "John Coleman is, after all, the man who gave this world the Jockey Club," one ex-director says.

The loan was to have been for more than $1 mil-

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lion, but one director came across a *New York* magazine profile of Coleman that made him sound like a bit of a rotter. After quietly passing the profile around, the directors decided to go ahead and lend to the man, but to offer him no more than a million, which he hasn't repaid. Hodges now says he had doubts about Coleman's financial stability—but he didn't want to offend Said. It is a profound demonstration of the casual attitude with which the directors approached lending that today many of them regard the Coleman loss as a sort of success.

DBAcle

In 1984, Brent Scowcroft also tried to bring his share of business to the bank, also with dismal results. Along with director Harry Huge, who originally urged Hodges to recruit Scowcroft for the board, Scowcroft served as a director for DBA Systems, a Florida-based firm that makes computerized maps and imaging systems. Scowcroft owned a large amount of DBA stock (on his financial disclosure form, it's listed only as "over $250,000"); Huge's law firm served as DBA's principal counsel. In 1985, Scowcroft and Huge introduced Howard Hebert, DBA's president, to Luther Hodges and the National Bank of Washington. Hebert became a director for a Virginia bank that NBW owned, and, with Huge and Scowcroft vouching for the company, DBA took out several million-dollar loans from that bank and from NBW. It was all very cozy. But things were turning ugly down in Florida.

DBA used to be a small, can-do firm, a magnet for whiz kids fresh out of graduate school. "No one could touch us," a former employee remembers. But when Hebert, an investment consultant, took over in 1979, things changed. He made no pretense of knowing the digitized mapping business, but he said he could make DBA earnings "explode." The first thing he did was to clear the tech-heads off the DBA board in favor of men like Scowcroft and Huge who had dazzling contacts and who shared his philosophy about making the company grow (sound familiar?). DBA began taking big government contracts—$300 to $400 million—which DBA employees thought were too cumbersome and ill-conceived for their strike-force operation.

At the beginning of 1988, DBA took out yet another multimillion dollar loan, to the concern of the OCC, which hinted in its annual bank examination that DBA had problems Hodges wasn't aware of. DBA employees had gone public with complaints that the company had overcharged the government and mismanaged several contracts and that Hebert had inflated DBA's contract backing in reports to stockholders and the SEC. Soon, stockholders were filing suits accusing Hebert of manipulating stock prices. In 1989, lawsuits cost DBA $1.1 million of its $1.3 million income. The OCC bank examiners exerted tremendous pressure on NBW to pay out the DBA loan, and it did, although Hodges is not sure how much money, if any, the bank lost on the loan. Hebert and at least five directors, including Huge and Scowcroft, have since resigned from DBA.

The DBA loan is one of many the SEC is now investigating. "On the face of it," says Hodges, "there was no reason to doubt that it was a good loan for the bank. Mr. Huge was the lawyer for DBA. General Scowcroft is an honorable man and he was very deeply involved with DBA. No, I wouldn't say it's part of a director's purview to know whether *that* kind of trouble is brewing." According to Hodges, a director isn't supposed to enmesh himself in minutiae: "A director looks at the large field and looks for opportunities. If the head of the company tells General Scowcroft and Huge that things are going well, they have no reason not to believe him. They were all friends."

"It doesn't look good to have a lot of problem banks in your region," explains one OCC examiner. "You don't want to be perceived as a problem and end up driving a Buick for the Federal Reserve looking at cowtown banks in . . . Iowa."

Friendship also led Hodges and the rest of his directors to come through when, in 1987, Bob Washington needed a $10 million loan for his law firm, the infamous Finley, Kumble (see "Lawyer's Poker," Michael Lewis, January/February 1991). The firm had borrowed and paid off a multimillion-dollar loan from NBW the year before. But this time, when the loan officer asked Washington for his firm's 1986 financial statements as required, Washington said the statements weren't ready. The loan officer thought this was odd and stood up to the director: Without the statements, he said, there was no way NBW could make the loan. Washington went

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straight to Hodges. "He said the statements were coming," Hodges recalls. "They were at the printers being redone or something." Ordinarily, that excuse would have been enough to get the loan. But NBW's 1987 losses on real estate and international loans made Hodges wary. He came up, however, with a way to allay his fears.

On June 3, 1987, Washington and two other Finley, Kumble partners signed a statement swearing that the firm was in sound financial health. That statement was used in lieu of the financial reports, which were supposedly coming "any day." The statement was untrue; the firm was $70 million in debt, and its California partners were accusing those in Washington of bad management. Just six months after Washington swore his firm was rock solid, it was bankrupt, with creditors pounding at the door. One of those creditors was NBW.

NBW didn't get its $10 million back. To make matters worse, a few months later, the firm's California partners sued NBW over the loan. Why? "Two of the suits are standard lender-liability suits," Kathleen Collins explains. In layperson's terms, the California partners sued NBW because they believed no reasonable and prudent man would have lent those Washington partners money.

The cattle prod

Where were the bank examiners while all this money was being passed around? It's a very good question. NBW was examined on an annual basis, with occasional follow-ups, by the OCC, the elite force among banking's regulators. OCC flyboys make $80,000 to $100,000 per year.

Their job is to rate a bank on a scale of one through five, one being excellent, in the categories of capital position, loan portfolio, earnings, management, and asset liquidity. OCC ratings are not made public. Although NBW had occasional low ratings in capital position and the quality of its portfolio, Hodges says management was never rated less than two until 1989, when the directors started suing each other. After an investigation, the NBW examiner would make an audiovisual presentation of his findings to the directors. "The comments were always very mild and the suggestions very minor," Collins remembers. "They never said 'suspend dividends' or 'sell that operation.' "

But, like the junior loan officers, the OCC investigators didn't feel it was their place to criticize. "In theory, we have lots of discretionary power, but in actuality, we're supposed to be team players just like everyone else," one of those examiners says now. "It doesn't look good to have a lot of problem banks in your region. And the real estate boom was sort of proof that Reaganomics was working. A few of us rocked the boat about Latin loans and our bosses came down on us hard. The OCC is a good place for an examiner and it looks good on a resume when you leave. You don't want to be perceived as a problem and end up driving a Buick for the Federal Reserve looking at cowtown banks in . . . Iowa."

Surly withdrawal

The NBW directors had a pretty good time for a while. But some friendships aren't meant to last. "Things just fell apart so fast," says Collins. "I've never seen anything like it. And most of them still hate each other, which is unusual for this . . . type of men."

The downward slide began in 1987, when NBW wrote off $26.5 million of its $117 million in bad foreign loans. With its price per share already slipping, the bank's holding company made a new stock offering in an effort to raise money. The Arab investors tried to stop the sale, because it would dilute their holdings. When Hodges went ahead and did it anyway, they turned on him—as did Hodges's old tennis partner, Bob Washington.

Washington had dazzled Said and Idilby. "They were so impressed—he once smoked cigars in the nonsmoking section of Duke Ziebert's," a Washington associate says. "He introduced them to Jesse Jackson. When Said bought Garfinckel's, he took them to meet Marion Barry. While they were sitting in Washington's office once, he got Ed Meese on the phone." Of course, if Washington had access, the Arabs had money. In October 1988, the Arab investors and Washington filed separate complaints with the SEC seeking to remove Hodges as bank chairman and CEO. The move shocked the other directors, who still had faith in Hodges; they assumed the Arab investors and Washington were trying to take over the bank. "The SEC complaint was so rude. It was just so rude we felt we couldn't ignore it," Hodges says. The Arab investors and Washington "should have come and talked to the board first, kept it in the family, instead of running to the SEC. We sued the Arab investors to teach them that you don't behave that way. There's a certain code that governs behavior."

The lawsuit accused Said and Washington of an "unlawful, surreptitious scheme" to seize control of NBW. "[I]nstead of teaching them a lesson, I think the suit scared them to death," Hodges admits. "And they fought back with everything they had." Washington threatened 10 different directors with lists of suits and complaints. Hodges and Washington began

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waging war on each other through the press. The board meetings became nightmares. Ordinarily, meeting minutes were about 15 pages long, but minutes from the 1988 and 1989 meetings are thick as Manhattan phone books and filled with insults and innuendo. Directors were no longer so worried about displaying "bad form." Witness this 1989 exchange:

Director 1: We cannot discuss your proposal with complete freedom and candor with you sitting in the room. Your presence is an inhibitive [sic] factor.

Director 2: I will leave the room for exactly 20 minutes. That is 20 minutes by my watch.

Director 1: Well, I think the time should be kept on a neutral watch. [Secretary's name], do you have a watch? Why don't you go stand in the hall, too, and keep time? That seems fair.

Director 2: May I see your watch?

The bank hired a law firm to represent the directors Washington was suing, a separate law firm for the four directors investigating Washington's complaint, and a third law firm for Hodges. No one knows how many complaints, claims, cross-claims, and motions were filed among the parties. Collins estimates that the bank spent a least $1 million each year just to keep abreast of the suits.

In April 1989, Said and Hodges reached an out-of-court settlement, although Washington kept up his flurry of suits. Hodges agreed to resign in January 1990 if he couldn't find a buyer for the bank. He couldn't, and he left peacefully—with a $1.4 million, federally approved parachute to cushion his fall.

Perhaps NBW could have survived, despite its decaying loan portfolio, were it not for all the bad blood in its board of directors. A few potential buyers came calling, but they claim they couldn't get a response from the special committee, headed by Harry Huge and Thomas Boggs, that was set up to run the bank. Bidders say that the committee spent an inordinate amount of time wrangling with Washington, who, while suing the directors, was also trying to buy the bank (backed, unfortunately, by Drexel Burnham). The committee was tardy in returning calls, supplying information, responding to letters. No one seemed to be in charge. Demoralized NBW employees occasionally tried to help out, with unpleasant results. One bank officer remembers engaging in hand-to-hand combat in the hall when he tried to wrench some proxy statements from a committee assistant's hands. "The bidder asked for them weeks before. I just got sick of seeing them sit on the asshole's desk."

The death blows weren't long in coming. After NBW reported a first-quarter loss of $5.7 million on April 10, 1990, several banks withdrew the back-up lines of credit they had provided the holding company's commercial paper, which had been sold to investors to keep the bank afloat. On May 7, the holding company defaulted on $25.8 million worth of commercial paper. Then, in July, after a three-month investigation by the feds, NBW announced an astounding $80 million second-quarter loss. Two weeks later, on August 1, the holding company filed for bankruptcy, and at 8:45 that evening the regulators moved in and took over. "We didn't want this management to run it," L. William Seidman, chairman of the FDIC, told *Changing Times*.

Man over board

Today, five of the NBW directors are shopping book deals. Bob Washington has opened yet another law firm. The mysterious Arabs have gone back to tending their more lucrative investments. Temporarily, Hodges is ensconced in a small office in a prototypically eighties building, its peach marble interior complete with sweeping stairs, vast garden terraces, and a bubbling fountain punctuated by Cubist sculpture. He wants to write a novel based on NBW's collapse, but the project is on hold. There have been so many financial scandals lately that publishers say they are swamped with high-roller tell-alls.

Hodges still clings to his—that is, George Bush's—vision of banking's future. "There will be fewer and bigger banks, gigantic international banks, more automation," he says. "There won't be the kind of personal service people are used to today. But that's like wanting the corner drugstore to last forever."

If that's true, let's hope the next generation of bankers sheds the traditional insider culture that Hodges's generation tried to graft onto this embryonic banking system. At NBW, the owners were always the real beneficiaries of "personal service." "There was one time, right after the SEC filing and before all hell broke loose, that I had a calm talk with Said," Hodges recalls. "He said he didn't want us to sell any more stock; he would put up any money we needed. But we couldn't sell the bank, he said. He'd changed his mind. He wanted to control his own bank."

What would have happened if Hodges had decided to go along with that plan?

"It would have been a respectable little bank that earned a respectable income year after year. That's all it would have ever been. I felt like I owed more to the people I represented."

Meaning the bank's employees and depositors?

"No, meaning the investors. They were my friends. I talked them into investing, and they were expecting a big return for their million. It would be unfair to let them down."

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Class Inaction

How 3,000 overpaid administrators stymie D.C. school reform

by Michael Willrich

The little kids attending D.C.'s Malcolm X Elementary School last year already had grown-up-sized hurdles to leap. Their reading and math scores ranked among the lowest in D.C.'s 175 public schools; 98 percent of them were eligible for free or subsidized lunches; the school itself had 114 fire code violations, including a broken fire alarm system. And every one of Malcolm X's students lived in Congress Heights, one of D.C.'s toughest enclaves. But looking back, Malcolm X parents believe the biggest obstacle to their kids' success was not poverty at all. It was the principal, Sandra Coates.

For several years, parents say, Coates hit their kids, refused to let the youngsters take textbooks home, and sold them school supplies that the taxpayers had already paid for. But when parents voiced concern, Coates dismantled the PTA. When parents took their complaints to the central office of the D.C. public schools, nothing happened. And Coates kept hitting up the children for money.

Finally, over fierce objections from the central office, the parents called a press conference, airing their charges and demanding a formal investigation. Only then did the central office begin to move. After a confidential investigation, Coates was removed—but not fired. Today, she's the principal at another elementary school in Southeast D.C., where the parents are a quieter bunch.

Deborah Vaughan, a single mother of four boys at Malcolm X, was the leader of the parents' fight against the principal and the central office. Her ordeal is over, but she knows that the problem remains. "We think it's terrible to send persons with such histories to other schools to do the same thing," she says. "We hold the administration responsible."

Michael Willrich is a Washington writer.

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Holding the administration responsible—now that's something rare in the D.C. public school system, which possesses perhaps the most oversized and under concerned educational bureaucracy in the country. Many have tried to do it. But even the best—like the D.C. Committee on Public Education (COPE)—have failed to make the bureaucratic monster pay attention to D.C.'s little kids.

It's been two years since COPE, the blue-ribbon commission to beat all blue-ribbon commissions, united seasoned school activists and the cream of Washington commerce—Washington Post Co. Chairman Katharine Graham, hardware mogul John Hechinger, and developer Oliver Carr—to design a plan for reforming the D.C. schools. COPE spent a half-million private dollars on a top-to-bottom investigation of the system—counting every pencil pusher, poking every paint chip, and interviewing more than 1,000 employees. The resulting report, *Our Children, Our Schools*, documents one of the most troubled urban school systems in America. Choose your failure index: a 40 percent dropout rate; substandard test scores; a citywide grade average of D+; decrepit buildings that rain plaster on students. But perhaps most significant, COPE found that *a third* of the D.C. schools' $529 million budget was not being spent on students at all; instead, it sustained a school bureaucracy unprecedented for a school district of D.C.'s size. In order to put new programs into motion, COPE urged, 400 bureaucrats should be cut from the payroll—at a savings of $8.5 million a year.

A year later, a second civic-minded commission—headed by Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Alice Rivlin—sent its investigators to school. Its findings were even more urgent. *Eight hundred* unnecessary central office staff members should go—and the tens of millions recovered should be immediately infused into the needy, crumbling schools.

No school system could have had better blueprints for making lasting change. Unfortunately, making lasting change has turned out to be one of the D.C. school system's weaker subjects. So far, not a single D.C. administrator has received his walking papers. Not a single million has been diverted back to the kids. It turns out there was one thing Deborah Vaughan could've taught Katharine Graham and Alice Rivlin about the D.C. public school system. Knowing what's wrong is only the beginning. To *fix it*, you've got to reform the administrative culture that protects its own over the interests of kids. You've got to take on the powerful bureaucrats, the school board, and the teachers union—the quiet saboteurs of D.C. school reform.

The fizzling of the latest reform effort isn't much of a surprise for Washington school kids, whose expectations have never been high. Fully a third of them live below the poverty line. At some schools, seven of every 10 students come from single-parent homes, where parents themselves are often high school dropouts. Under such circumstances, a kid's outlook on the future can understandably be limited. That sense of personal limitation is only reinforced by a school system with rock-bottom expectations.

Parents like Vaughan bring change to their schools despite, not because of, the system. For at the core of the school system is a Sovietized central bureaucracy that puts its thumb print on virtually every move made inside the school: dictating curricula, issuing dubious directives, and even deciding, on winter days, which playgrounds get de-iced and which don't. Textbooks and supplies, all routed through the central office, routinely take 90 days to be delivered to teachers—who some-

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times give up waiting and buy the stuff themselves.

Delabian Rice-Thurston, head of Parents United, a D.C. parents' group, recalls her first visit to her son's school, Stevens Elementary. "I noticed that there was no playground equipment for the kids, but when I asked the principal, he told me that the PTA had already bought $5,000 worth." It seemed the swing sets and jungle gyms were all in storage; the central office staff hadn't got around to installing them. The helpless principal then turned to Rice-Thurston, beseeching *her* to call the office and see what she could do.

A visit to that famous central office—honeycombed into the 12-story Presidential Building—helps explain why things fall through central office cracks. Employees peddle Mary Kay cosmetics from their cubicles; on a bulletin board, a party invitation reads, "Bring your favoret [sic] spirits." Insiders describe the central office as a fraternity of friends, where the only hard rule is "don't rock the boat." Jim Ford, the budget analyst for the City Council's education committee, puts it this way: "When I worked over there, we had a saying, 'If you're competent, you better have your resume in order. If you're competent *and* dedicated, you better have it circulating.'"

Many of the school system's bureaucrats came up through the D.C. schools together; more than a few are teachers and principals who performed miserably in the schools and were "kicked upstairs." After one year's probation, almost all administrators settle into a tenured position—be it as a $38,971 procurement analyst or a $66,176 human resources coordinator or a $90,704 acting superintendent. Once they do, it's almost impossible to fire them.

No one, not even the Peat Marwick bean-counters hired by COPE to find out, knows exactly how many of these "administrators" are floating around the D.C. schools. That's in part a deliberate deception. The central office often camouflages administrators with inaccurate job titles—for instance, classifying central office staff members as teachers on the payroll. The system's official count of its "central management" and "central services" employees is 1,294. Peat Marwick, on the other hand, counted 3,153 non-school-based personnel.

How many of these employees are unnecessary? COPE said 400, the Rivlin Commission twice that. But even those numbers seem low when you consider this: Today, the D.C. schools employ more administrative employees than the largest school district in the country, New York City—which teaches 11 times more students and itself has a notoriously bloated school bureaucracy.

As parent leader Rice-Thurston observes, "If we had excessive administration *and* high levels of achievement, people wouldn't be concerned." Obviously, though, that's not the case. Every year, as more and more city money goes to staff, salaries, and administrative fringes, the system spends $532 to $682 less per student *on instruction* than comparable urban systems.

The only ones losing out, it seems, are the kids: kids like Melissa Brantley, a learning disabled student who was held back in second grade for three years, tossed around to three different schools, before the system finally tested her for a learning disability last year; the kids in one junior high school in Northeast, where the heating system is so bad that they shiver one day and suffer nose bleeds from dry heat the next; the 10th graders in one high school class in Anacostia, most of whom read at a fifth- or sixth-grade level; or the needy kids in D.C.'s Head Start program, who never saw $299,789 in federal funds marked for them in 1989. The D.C. government had forgotten to use them before the grant period expired.

Of course, there's one thing the central office never forgets to spend money on: itself. Last June, with the city in a budget crunch, 150 school system employees packed their bags for a $20,000 taxpayer-financed retreat at a hotel in Fredericksburg, Virginia. School officials steadfastly defended the excursion, saying that employees could get more work done outside the city.

And in a way, that explanation made sense. Clearly, little was getting done downtown.

Dr. Jenkins and Mr. Hyde

Dr. Andrew E. Jenkins's brief career as school superintendent speaks volumes about the self-perpetuating culture of the central administration. It also helps explain why careful reform proposals have been so difficult to implement.

When longtime superintendent Floretta McKenzie retired in 1988, school employees had one firm idea about who her successor should be. As insiders told it, the new boss must be "one of us": a product of the culture he'd preside over. By that criterion, Andrew Jenkins was their man.

A graduate of D.C.'s Spingarn High, a former science teacher in the schools, and a longtime central office staff member, Jenkins took office in July 1988 with a perfect-on-paper agenda: reforming the "top-down" school system and putting "more authority where the action is"—in the schools. To do that, he produced a vaunted "reorganization plan" that called for offering early retirement to 100 administrators, reassigning 70 other administrators to the schools as assistant principals, and gradually phasing in a school-based management scheme by giving some principals limited purchasing authority. Soon after

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the release of the COPE report, Jenkins announced plans for further cuts.

It seemed that he, an insider, might finally loosen the central office's stranglehold on the failing schools. But what little optimism accompanied Jenkins's appointment quickly faded. As far as anyone can tell, not a single administrator took him up on the early-out offer, which would've meant accepting a smaller pension package. And while the plan to send administrators back to the schools seemed great at first glance, the new "assistant principals" did essentially the same job that they did downtown. "It was in essence a shell game," says Karen Shook, chairman of the school board's finance committee. "It was never a cut of bloat."

Why such intransigence, despite report upon report targeting bloat as one of the schools' most pressing problems? The chief purpose of every bureaucrat is to protect his job, goes one ironclad law of bureaucracy. A second law proves equally valid in the case of the D.C. schools: The closer a bureaucrat is to the boss, the less likely he is to get laid off. "That's what the school system does—protect its own," says Eugene Kinlow, a 12-year veteran of the school board who quit in December. "You've got a lot of people who have been working together for many years, and it's almost a closed circle. It's a very protective old-boy network."

One publicized glimpse of this network came in 1989, when *The Washington Post* reported that a $395,000 federal grant for dropout prevention was going unused. Jenkins promptly fired the program director, but he admitted that the director was a friend whom he had hired despite the fact that she had no experience in dropout prevention. Other examples of the culture don't get such close scrutiny. According to budget analyst Jim Ford, the city's $906,000 ROTC and military science program could be funded entirely by federal money. But an influential web of retired military personnel on the D.C. payroll has convinced the administration to resist this, because under the federal program they would be replaced by active-duty officers.

It's not as if D.C. school officials need an old-boy network. They're already protected by a classic, seniority-based civil service structure—including a personnel regulation called "bumping" that provides one of the biggest excuses for avoiding administrative reform. When a tenured employee's position is eliminated, he can simply "bump" the job of a less senior employee—even if that employee is doing a superior job. If the system's 800 or so unnecessary positions were to be eliminated without reforming the bumping rule, a massive game of bumper cars could begin, with administrators bumping assistant principals, assistant principals bumping teachers, and so on down the line. That carries horrors particular to the schools. "We never know whether an administrator got out of the classroom because he was terrific or because he was awful," says Rice-Thurston. "We don't want bad people bumping back. We don't want to lose our new, good, young teachers."

School board games

Busting the old-boy network and saving those new, good, young teachers—that sounds like just the job for the school board: elected officials who can protect the interests of students when the central office won't. But take a look at the school board. You can't miss 'em, or at least the lifesize color photos of them displayed in a gallery just outside their offices in the penthouse of the Presidential Building.

Self-reverential poster art is just one of the many fringes of election to the D.C. school board, a well-established springboard into D.C. politics. (It's where former mayor Marion Barry got his start.) And as members plot their political futures from their offices, they do it in grand style. A 1989 survey of urban school districts by the National School Boards Association found that D.C. school board members were paid more than representatives of any other school board in the country—$27,575 in 1990, although board membership is a part-time job. But it's not just pay that sets the D.C. school board apart from its peers. It also boasts a more bloated staff than any other city surveyed. While the nearby city of Alexandria employs one clerk for its entire school board, for instance, D.C.'s dozens of school board staff members eat up an annual $1.5 million.

In interviews, school board members justify their own ungainly bureaucracy with this logic: Because the central administration is so screwed up, the board needs a full-time fiefdom of its own. Therein lies the problem, says former member Kinlow. "If you had board members who were truly part-time board members and they didn't have the luxury of trying to play superintendent themselves, they might more readily do their own job, which is to hold the superintendent's feet to the fire."

Instead, they more often find themselves complicit in central office deceptions. Last year, the city council learned that the schools' official student count of 88,000—the number driving its annual budget—included 8,000 kids who didn't exist. Several school board members knew of this discrepancy months before the annual budget hearings. But instead of getting angry, they kept quiet—to the city council's fury. The bigger the padding, after all, the bigger the schools' budget. And the school board is an ardent advocate of bigger budgets for the D.C. schools.

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Still, the school board has worked to remove at least *one* ineffective administrator—Andrew Jenkins himself. Tired of Jenkins's all-talk reorganization, the board at first tried to bribe him, offering him $200,000 to quit. When that failed, it fired him in December, sparking a schoolhouse brawl in the board room. Jenkins had packed the meeting with parents and activists who were convinced that if Jenkins were fired his plans for an Afrocentric curriculum would be threatened. Jenkins himself accused the majority-black board of racism. By the time the meeting ended, protesters had hurled trash at board members, pelted one member with a water pitcher, and vandalized another office. Today, Jenkins is no longer superintendent of D.C. schools, but he's still on the D.C. payroll—as a highly paid central administration employee.

Nobody said cutting administrators was going to be easy.

Creature teachers

Breaking the central office stranglehold is only the first step in D.C. school reform. For of all the waste and inefficiency protected by the system, none is more costly—in real terms—than the brotherhood of staff *inside* the schools. In buildings throughout the city, the school system posts its corporate motto: "All students can learn, all teachers can teach, all schools can be successful." The first and third are noble. The second, of course, isn't true.

The COPE report dubs D.C.'s 6,700 teachers the school system's "unsung heroes," praising them for doing a tough job amidst terrible conditions. But it mentions in passing that when principals and teachers were asked what portion of their school's teaching force was incompetent, the answers "were remarkably consistent—somewhere between 10 percent and 20 percent." That's an *enormous* bloc of incompetent teachers. And that's an estimate made by teachers and principals, so the real figure is probably higher. But only 4 or 5 teachers get fired every year. That leaves, say, 665 of them in the classroom every year—and thousands of kids at their mercy.

In the rare case a principal does deem a teacher "unsatisfactory," a mountain of paperwork stands between the teacher and dismissal. That's a headache many administrators would just as soon avoid. So the "better" principals pass the trash to some other, quieter school. The rest just let sleeping dogs lie.

For years, parents complained about a second-grade teacher at Adams Elementary in Northwest. According to former PTA president Vic Miller, this elderly teacher used to teach junior high but could no longer handle her class. So she was dispatched to teach the little ones. At Adams, the teacher allegedly hit kids to keep order and rarely assigned homework. Along with other parents and an advocacy group, Miller filed several complaints with the central office, but heard nothing. After further inquiries, he was told that the teacher's file had been lost. Finally, a parent filed a Freedom of Information Act request, asking for all the system's files on the case. That did the trick. After four years of work, Miller received word that the teacher had retired. "These kids have had a year stolen from them," he says bitterly.

Cases like these aren't just freak occurrences. They're the inevitable result of a teacher evaluation system designed to protect teachers' rights over those of the students they serve. The principals and assistant principals who conduct teacher evaluations are forbidden to include any observations made outside of their one or two classroom visits. Despite her poor reputation on campus, the Adams teacher needed only to perform well a couple of days a year, when the principal came calling. And perform is the operative word here, because evaluators are often completely untrained in the subjects of teachers they're supposed to be judging. In a recent evaluation, one teacher was cited not for misinterpreting *Romeo and Juliet*, not for failing to pique his students' interest, but for having his window shade pulled too low.

The chances of D.C.'s designing a smarter, more kid-centric evaluation system are slim, for one simple reason: Any change in the process must be OK'd by the 5,500-member Washington Teachers Union, which has a selfish incentive for keeping the process more or less as it is: They made it. "We developed the system back in 1981, and it has worked well," says William Simons, who has led the union for most of the past quarter century.

Culture clubbing

In times of crisis, families look inward for strength. Government bureaucracies look outward for a rescuing angel. Today, with the city backed against a $316 million budget deficit, the hopes of school advocates are focused on finding a new superintendent to begin the hard job of reformation: a superintendent who can ride in like a spaghetti-western Clint Eastwood, waving a mandate to restore law and order. "What we need is the toughest son-of-a-bitch around to come in here and take charge," says a COPE member. But, as Rice-Thurston knows, one straight-shooting superintendent is not enough. "What big opportunity is there in getting a new superintendent," she asks, "when the old bureaucracy is still in place?"

By now, the D.C. schools have been studied to death by the best. The needs could not be more clear:

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fewer bureaucrats and better teachers—and above all, a structure that leaves the job of educating kids in those teachers' hands. It's not a matter of studies or money. It's a matter of changing a culture.

The first step involves firm intentions and a firmer lawyer—someone who can help the new superintendent find the deadweight and shed it legally. But with a little planning by the new superintendent, the lawyer should become unnecessary. New, sensible civil service rules would allow him to fire incompetents and jettison unneeded staff without a member of the bar at his side. And speaking of sensible rules, the bumping stipulation must also be bumped—to make sure central office chaff doesn't wind up in the classroom.

With at least 800 fewer administrators to interfere and millions more dollars to help, teachers would be free, finally, to focus on the kids. But giving teachers more power increases the necessity of making sure *every* teacher is a good one. To do that, the new superintendent should follow Parents United's apt advice: Compel the union to relinquish its veto power over the evaluation process, and then form a professional teacher evaluation corps to evaluate teachers right—which means judging how a teacher conveys her subject matter, not how she sets her window shades.

If these basic reforms prove too politically charged for those inside the system, the final step must be up to D.C. voters: to elect a school board with the moxie to treat schools not as kindergartens for their political careers, but as the critical institutions they are. Of course, the school board won't get worked up about the administrative drain on the schools until citizens pay attention. And that requires a press sophisticated and patient enough to explain, the next time the bureaucrats and teachers rally over "critical school budget cuts," what's really going on inside the D.C. public schools.

Today, Congress Heights's Malcolm X Elementary is thriving, with parents in the schools every day, tutoring, designing displays, escorting kids on their bus rides home. The PTA has surged from half a dozen members to more than 100, and the future for kids like those of Deborah Vaughan looks brighter than it has in years.

But Malcolm X shouldn't be the only school that works *for* its kids rather than against them. And with a new superintendent, a willing school board, and COPE's comprehensive plan for reform, D.C. has a fresh opportunity to make the whole system a model of educational reform instead of the case study in bureaucratic disaster that it is today. As Vaughan will be the first to tell you, even the worst schools can change for the better—if they can get the bureaucrats out of their way. □

The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

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John Matisonn

National Public Radio

In a wide-ranging inquiry broadcast from January 31 to February 4, South Africa-based reporter John Matisonn crossed the Atlantic to face America's "uncomfortable parallels." Housing in Chicago is as segregated as that in Johannesburg. Economic development happens in the white suburbs, leaving blacks behind in the inner city. Liberal white professionals in Minneapolis, like their counterparts in South Africa, believe they are color-blind but feel vaguely uncomfortable around blacks. Yet what Matisonn finds most disturbing is not a similarity but a difference: South Africans are full of hope about the future of race relations; Americans are confused and disheartened. Matisonn wisely doesn't proffer facile explanations or solutions to America's complex "race problem." But he does suggest that the lack of public goals, or even a public dialogue, breeds a numbing hopelessness.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

Nominations for stories published or aired in April will close May 15. The winner will be announced in the July/August issue.

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Pretty Worthless

Whatever happened to making movies that make a difference?

by Beth Austin

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In the 1954 film *On the Waterfront*, Marlon Brando plays a dockworker named Terry Malloy whose brother is in cahoots with the vicious leader of the dockworkers' local. Although he resists falling in with the crooks, Terry also has no interest in trying to stop them. When an investigator from the crime commission tries to question him, Terry more or less sums up his philosophy of life: "I don't know nothin', I ain't seen nothin', an' I ain't sayin' nothin'."

Enter Edie (Eva Marie Saint). She's educated and has a shot at escaping the docks; if she falls for Terry, she probably never will. But much more threatening to the relationship than Terry's lack of money or brains are Edie's weird ideas. She's putting herself on the line to clean up the waterfront, and she expects no less from Terry. "Shouldn't everybody care about everybody else?" she asks him. He looks amazed. "Boy," he observes, "are you a fruitcake."

As *On the Waterfront* amply demonstrates, Hollywood has never been a hotbed of complex moral thinking. But the past few years have seen a dramatic narrowing of the issues and themes addressed in the movies. The cinematic legacy of the Reagan era divides roughly into two categories. On one hand are what could be characterized as outward-looking films, in which the main players try to save or avenge their friends/town/city/planet. These heroes are not descendants of George Bailey, who through example and hard work kept Bedford Falls from the clutches of Mr. Potter, or of Gary Cooper, who made it almost to the end of *High Noon* without firing a shot. Instead, they take after *Dirty Harry*, whose readiness to blow holes through villains seemed to be all that stood between San Francisco and the apocalypse. No one will be shocked to hear that this bloody-buddy genre has its moral deficiencies.

The Reagan years' other moral legacy to Hollywood is more inward-looking: the exaltation of "family values," in which the family itself has become our only value, the single bright ray in an increasingly murky world. Compared to the bloodbaths of the cop films, these movies are refreshing not only because they're generally fun to watch, but because of their emphasis on love and sincerity within relationships. Still, you don't have to be a graduate of NYU film school to see that the warm, fuzzy movies celebrating friendship, family, and the occasional dog are also lacking morally. In fact, as a

Beth Austin is a Chicago writer. All photographs courtesy of Photofest.

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moviegoer—and a wife and a mother and a journalist—I find them not just empty, but insidious, because they leave us feeling so good about our insulated selves. The redoubtable Edie would never have settled for such moral interior decorating, as Terry learns to his peril. She flings his offer of a mere relationship right back in his face: "No wonder everybody calls you a bum."

He pursues her, bewildered. "I'm only trying to help you out. I'm trying to keep you from getting hurt," Terry mumbles. "What more do you want me to do?"

"Much more," Edie fires back, almost snarling, "much, much, much more."

Radicchio ad absurdum

Much more, indeed. In trying to produce "family" movies, today's popular filmmakers have confused niceness with morality and ended up creating a moral universe that stops at the front door. Trend spotting is, of course, a risky business, and there are some exceptions—this year's Oscar-sweeping *Dances With Wolves* comes to mind, as do other films such as *Glory, The Hunt for Red October*, and *Guilty by Suspicion*—to confuse the rule. But a look at the heart-warming blockbusters of recent years indicates that, in general, we hold these truths to be self-evident: that a parent's highest responsibility is to provide complete emotional and financial security for his child; that women exist to help men get beyond their fear of intimacy and commitment; and that personal relationships are the single most important facet of life.

And sometimes the only facet. In the latest afterlife extravaganza, *Defending Your Life*, Albert Brooks doesn't have to minister to lepers, save the rainforest, or even donate blood to reach a higher level of being. He just has to admit he loves Meryl Streep.

Of course, Brooks and Streep are utterly insulated from the real world—but then again, so are almost all movie couples. In *When Harry Met Sally*, the seal is so tight that any real human being would surely suffocate. We barely learn what the characters do to pay for their

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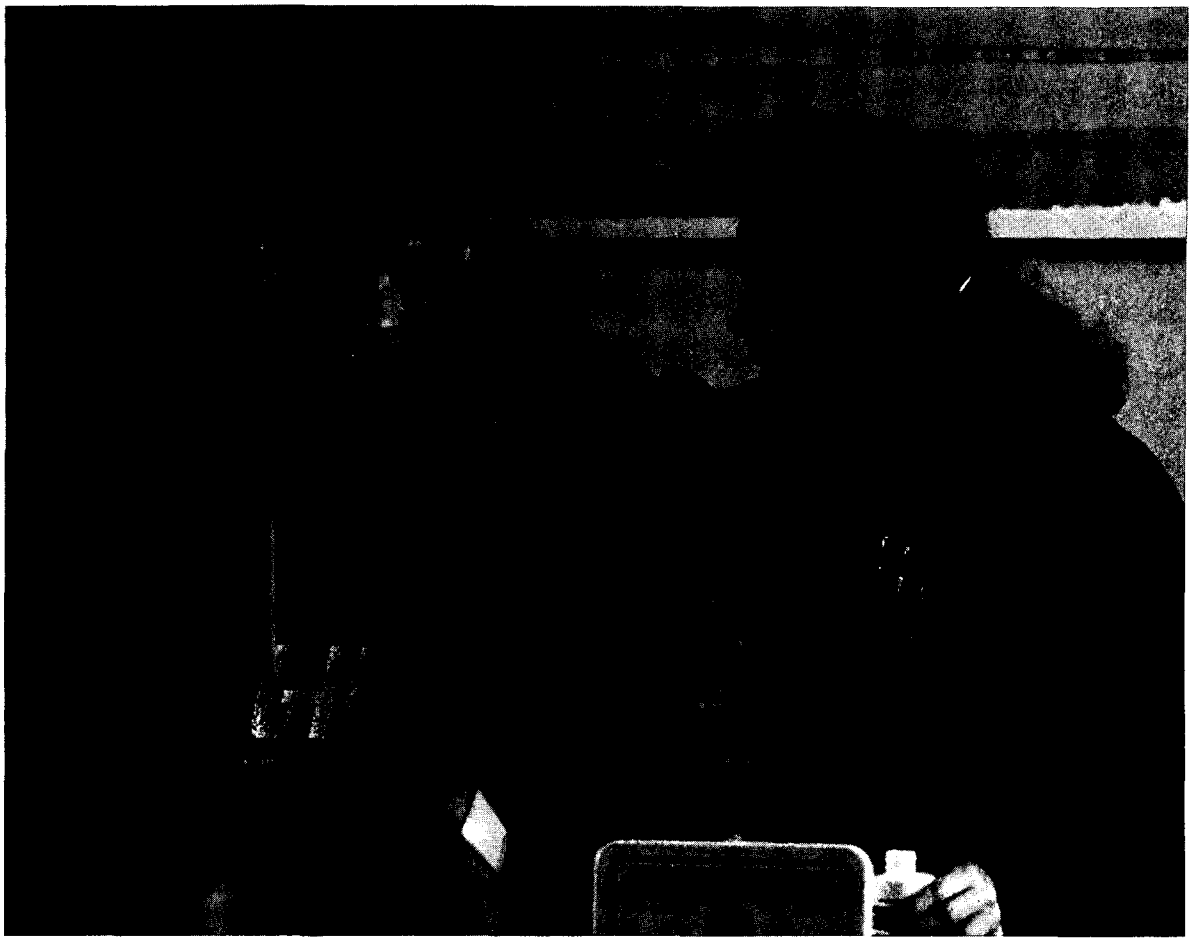

loft apartments, grilled radicchio, and Mexican ceramic tile floors. ("Everybody thinks they have good taste and a sense of humor," lectures Marie, the character played by Carrie Fisher, "but they couldn't all possibly *have* good taste.") The outside world intrudes only once, when Harry and Sally double-date with their best friends. Harry's friend Jess, an intense journalist, launches into passionate praise of Jimmy Breslin, calling his writing "a wake-up call to the city of New York": "He's saying we've actually got people in the city, people on welfare. . . ." And that's it. Sally rolls her eyes, and the conversation fades out, overlaid by Harry and Marie's discussion of window decorating.

Think back: Away from your VCR, when was the last time you heard a somber Rick reminding the audience that larger obligations give life meaning—that, when you get right down to it, "the problems of two little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world"? When was the last time you saw a Mr. Smith waving the Constitution on the Senate floor, expostulating, "I wouldn't give a red cent for *all* your fine rules, without there was some plain everyday, common kindness under 'em—and a little looking out for the next fella"?

A little looking out for the next fella is precisely what filmmakers are leaving out of their family-oriented pictures—a dangerous signal to be transmitting to our kids (at whom most of these movies are aimed), since, as Mr. Smith puts it in his homey, gender-specific terms, "Now, we're not gonna have a country that makes these kinds of rules *work*, if you haven't got men who've learned to tell human rights from a punch in the nose. And funny thing about men—they start life being boys."

Dances with wives

The people who start life being boys—and girls—have always looked to the screen to learn about life and love. Boys watch for whatever quality or action of the hero gets him the girl; girls learn what kind of girl is worth getting. At least the characters played by the

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likes of Jean Arthur, Katharine Hepburn, and Rosalind Russell had useful lives and independent minds. Today's female characters exist exclusively to bring white male stars in touch with The Things That Really Matter; once they grasp these Things, the stars win the prize.

Since well before Edie drove Terry to blow the whistle on the crooked local, Hollywood has been using women to make heroes out of men. But The Things That Really Matter have changed; today, they include nothing beyond personal relationships. In *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, Jean Arthur urges Jimmy Stewart, "Don't quit. Don't grab a measly chance like this to save a few pieces—other men could—but not you. As long as you lived, you'd remember you ran out and threw this country of yours to the jackals—!" If you can handle such a feat of cognitive dissonance, compare that movie to the blockbuster *Batman*. When Bruce Wayne (Michael Keaton) has to rush off to save Gotham City from poison-gas extermination, Vicky Vale (Kim Basinger) cavils, "It doesn't have to be a perfect world."

Getting the girl—in other words, doing the right thing—almost costs Terry his life, but by the time 1990's number two movie, *Pretty Woman*, rolled around, the price of a heroine had dropped to $300. Richard Gere—whose ambition is not to work on the docks but to own a shipyard—at first wins the girl, Julia Roberts, by, literally, paying for her. But keeping her, in both senses of the word, is another matter. Like Edie, Roberts wants much more from her man than he is prepared to deliver—but what, exactly? Good legislation? The defenestration of a corrupt union boss? No. She wants "the fairy tale." Roberts's mission is to use her feminine softness and her unstinting sexual healing to turn Gere from a cold corporate raider into a creative entrepreneur and a family man. To its credit, the movie drives home the lesson that Gere's work is not only worthless but dehumanizing. And as would a Jean Arthur, Roberts sets her man straight (at the same time helping him get over his resentment of his capitalist dad). But making the right career move still isn't enough for Gere to win Roberts. He has to realize he doesn't want to live without her and then *commit*.

Gere may turn to more productive work, but he doesn't sacrifice one thread of his thousand-dollar suits—which is fortunate, since, to deliver the fairy tale, he has to prove over and over again that he's Roberts's knight in platinum armor. He changes for her and he fights for her, but in the movie's most thrilling moments, he's always buying for her. He lifts her up from the slums to a luxury suite with a sweeping view. He decks her out in jewels and whisks her away in a private jet to San Francisco for the opera. With his invincible credit card, he vanquishes shopkeepers for her along Rodeo Drive, scooping up every item in sight as Roberts's smiles (and eyes) grow bigger and bigger. Eventually, he chases after her to carry her off—in a silver stretch limousine.

It's a nice nineties fairy tale, but don't try this at home. Today's movies show boys what it takes to win a girl in much the same way Steve Martin famously advised Americans on "How to be a Millionaire and Never Pay Taxes": "First," he said, "get a million dollars." "You know what's wrong with our waterfront?" cries Karl Malden, playing a Catholic priest also shamed by Edie into doing the right thing by the dockworkers. "It's the love of a lousy buck. It's making the love of a buck and a comfy job more important than love of your fellow man."

Making it with Meryl

Women aren't the only victims of cinematic morality in the nineties. Blacks are also put on earth—or at least on screen—to help white males "find out more about themselves." In films made by whites, blacks are almost universally portrayed as warm, centered, and soulful—so much so that it is positively refreshing to find that 1990's number five hit, *Total Recall*, features a lying, treacherous black man. This vision of blacks as conduits to The Things That Really Matter reaches an apogee in 1990's number one, *Ghost*, in which medium Whoopi Goldberg (a two-fer, a black female) gives up her body to the spectral Patrick Swayze so he can get in touch with Demi Moore just once more. Few movies take on the hard and dramatic issues that confront contemporary American blacks even as gingerly as *A Raisin in the Sun* did in 1961. Again, there are exceptions. This year's *New Jack City* takes a stab at exploring the connections between the drug culture and the underclass (though those issues ultimately get buried by the movie's buddy-cop format). Only Spike Lee seems consistently willing to consistently confront a range of issues related to race.

But, as *Do The Right Thing* proved, tackling such issues unsettles audiences, a risk most filmmakers never run. In general, when thirtysomething parents track down the elusive babysitter and head out to the mall to see one of today's blockbusters, they get not just an evening of lighthearted entertainment for their 14 bucks—they get a subtle validation of an "I'm OK, You're OK" view of society. In relationships, they learn, people need never make any painful demands on each other; Gere doesn't sacrifice to give Roberts what she needs; he merely realizes what *he* wants. Same deal in *Defending Your Life*. In Albert Brooks's cosmology, self-sacrifice isn't the highest good; it's the stupidest move you can make. In the penultimate scene, Brooks forfeits his chance to apotheosize not because he's been selfish and dishonest all his life, but because he didn't bed the willing Meryl Streep *even*

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though he really wanted to. Don't worry—he doesn't suffer for long. In the end, they wind up together, divinely happy.

Even a movie like *Rain Man*, which takes on themes that seem guaranteed to disturb audiences—autism and institutionalization—manages to cause no pain. At first, *Rain Man* presents the familiar plot: Cold troubled capitalist seeks gorgeous compassionate SWF to share nice car, difficulties with father. The female character, however, can't pull off her hero's redemption alone. Enter Raymond Babbitt (Dustin Hoffman)—not a woman or a minority but close, an autistic savant—who effectively teams up with her to bring his brother Charlie (Tom Cruise) in touch with those Things again: the importance of family and commitment. Who wasn't moved by the scenes late in the movie when Charlie and Raymond warm up to each other? But—and here's *Rain Man*'s painkiller—who wasn't subtly relieved when Charlie realizes that he can't care for his brother adequately (the guy can't even toast his own waffles, for Chrissake) and decides to ship him back to that wonderful institution, where he'll be so much happier? It's OK, the movie tells us; you love your relatives, you're committed to doing the best by them, so go ahead and institutionalize them. Keep the antique car, but send the brother back; he requires too much maintenance.

Cinema very tame

Consider *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The movie's central moral issue remains a tough one: Should Gregory Peck follow his conscience and defend a black man charged with rape, or should he turn his back on the case to protect himself and his young children from possible retaliation by an angry town? As Atticus Finch, Peck never wavers, even though his obedience to his conscience nearly costs his children their lives. The legal heroes of today's films take a different tack. In *Reversal of Fortune*, Ron Silver portrays Alan Dershowitz as a loving father and a model lawyer—brilliant, dedicated, and deliberately inattentive, not to the fee or celebrity involved, but to the moral implications of freeing Claus von Bulow.

Because of its apparent conflict between career and family, *To Kill a Mockingbird* sends a message that today's movies, with their emphasis on quality time, sincere relationships, and parent-child bonding, never approach: A vital part of loving your children—of loving anyone—is living a life they will admire, which can mean risking yourself and even your loved ones to do the right thing. It's disheartening to realize that, in a nineties movie, Atticus Finch would be considered a bad parent because he risks his family's safety for his work. Today, his daughter Scout would quickly set him straight, convincing him to ditch the case because nothing could be more important than spending more time at home.

Children who put their parents back on track show up throughout these family-oriented movies: The Shirley Temple genre has triumphed. *Look Who's Talking*, *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids, Dead Poets Society*, and *Home Alone* all feature children struggling to bring their insensitive, inadequate, or just plain bad parents in touch with the Things. Watching these movies, one pictures the filmmakers as disgruntled eight-year-olds being trundled off to bed, screaming and vowing revenge. As adults, they've made good on those childish threats by creating a slew of movies in which kids always know best. The calm, dependable, unbelievably wise and loving parents who once populated Hollywood have been replaced by a passel of unstable neurotics who need a good 12-step program—or a good 12-year-old—to bring them back onto solid family ground.

Home Alone develops this theme so cannily that it promises to replace *E.T.* (another kids-good, grown-ups-bad epic) as the top film moneymaker of all time. *Home Alone*'s winsome little hero, Kevin, is a terrific and resourceful kid whose light is hidden under the bushel of his family's disapproval. He comes into his own only when his family manages, accidentally, to leave for Paris without him. In his parents' absence, the plucky child manages to save his home from burglars, reconcile an elderly neighbor with his son and grandchildren, and, finally, bring his own family back home—where they belong—in time for Christmas.

Of course, Kevin is a juvenile delinquent compared to the adolescent paragon at the center of *Dead Poets Society*. He's perfect—brilliant, athletic, well mannered, charming, artistic, and unaffectedly sweet. The movie, notable for its greatest-hits approach to English literature, never explains how this extraordinary young man sprang from the loins of an overbearing, embittered father and a mealy mouthed zero of a mother, but it wholeheartedly endorses his raging case of adolescent self-pity (no one understands me, there's no place for me in this cold, cold world). When the father insists on placing his sensitive, artistic son on the premed track, the boy is forced to take the ultimate step in parent-rearing: suicide—which the movie treats as an act of Christ-like self-sacrifice, not of self-indulgence. Forget giving him space to experiment with his art. What that boy needed was a swift kick in the pants.

Parenthood is in many ways an exception. In that movie, we do get to see parenting from both sides of the spared rod; despite their flaws, most of the parents seem well intentioned. Still, when the parents make moral choices, family happiness is always the paramount issue. When Steve Martin has to pick between time at the office and time with his kids, it's a simple cost-benefit

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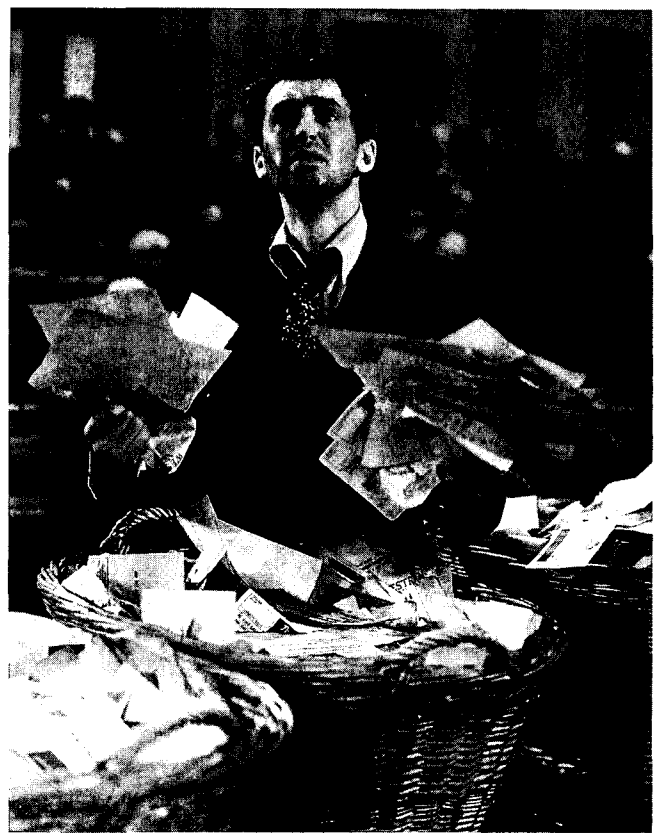
analysis: Money, although very good, is less valuable than family time. (It should be noted that his big choice is between maintaining an upper-middle-class lifestyle and a slightly less upper-middle-class lifestyle in which his wife would need to get a job.)

And exactly what was Martin doing at the office, anyway? You probably don't remember, because beyond paying the bills, his job had nothing to do with his family life—or, for that matter, with anybody's life, since he was an advertising executive. Meaningful work? Don't look for it in these films. In fact, in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, the parents are censured for pursuing their dreams, an act of betrayal that can only hurt, not instruct, their children. The mother's commitment to her job leaves her children feebly attempting to create order in their chaotic home. And Dad, the nutty professor, won't get a good job at a good wage. Instead, he wastes his time fiddling with a wacky invention just because it might cure cancer.



The purest example of this disregard for work is the sentimental blockbuster *Big*. It's all there: the sepia-tinted visions of home, the blacks who validate Tom Hanks's coolness by slapping him five but who never have a conversation with him, the self-pitying fear of the real world lurking beyond the threshold. At least *Big* presents an unpretentious portrait of home: The boyish Tom Hanks lives in a simple, middle-class house, without an ivy-clad all-boys school or a Ferrari in sight. The problem is that home is all that matters. In his grown-up incarnation, Hanks makes a ton of money and gets the girl, but those benefits prove insufficient compensation for the loss of his childhood. The world of childhood—playing ball with your pals in the crimson autumn leaves—is superior in every way to the world of work. The idea that tackling a problem at work can be just as much fun and even more satisfying never rates even a cameo in these movies. Family-centered films make no distinctions: Whether you're trying to cure cancer or invent toys, none of it is worthwhile if it cuts into quality time.

Each of these movies projects a Bush-era vision of the perfect family—warm, white, well heeled, and intact. But none of them asks what these good families are good for. When these exceptionally bright, centered, and resilient children grow up, will they consider their debt to society paid in full if they merely produce 2.2 perfect replicas of themselves?

No one is asking Hollywood to churn out an undifferentiated string of uplifting biographies, say, *Mother Teresa: The Black Hole of Calcutta*. But it's jarring, and somewhat frightening, to see the cheerful moral flatness of one screen couple and family after another. George Bailey would never have gone to work for Mr. Potter so he'd have more money and time to shower on little Zuzu, just as Bogie would never have let Ingrid Bergman's love for him stop her from getting on that plane.

It's equally hard to picture Gary Cooper ordering chardonnay—or Atticus Finch driving a BMW. Is everyone's moral sense blunted by materialism? Are moral people truly as scarce as moral movies? As *Home Alone*'s Kevin would say: I don't *think* so. Hollywood needs to realize, as its audience does, that good relationships require moral judgment of the highest order. It's easy for a third-grader, or a filmmaker with a third-grader's moral sophistication, to set out the relationship commandments: Be wise, loving, responsible, emotionally available, and financially secure, or your kids, girlfriend, or autistic brother will send you to bed without your supper. But families are not all alike, and each person must find a balance between the understandable desire to seal relationships off from the world and responsibility toward the greater community. These decisions are never simple, but they are filled with excitement and satisfaction to which Hollywood these days seems oblivious. ❑

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

GREAT MOMENTS IN THE LAW
In Great Falls, Montana, a man who had robbed and raped a woman and then stolen her car crashed into another car during the getaway. The owners of the second car are seeking to recover their damages by suing the rape victim.

YOU'LL COME BACK WITH A WARM GLOW
The government of the Soviet Union is now offering vacation package tours of Chernobyl.

AND THEY SAY JAPANESE BUSINESSES HAVE ALL THE NEW IDEAS
The Wall Street Journal reports that many American companies are setting up "humor task forces" and hiring "humor consultants." One firm, Eastman Kodak, even has a "humor room" stocked with toys.

THE LAST FRONTIER
Kathie Jones of Pensacola, Florida, has founded Urinette, Inc. to market the "She-inal," a device with a hose that allows women to urinate standing up.

SURE, WE'VE CHANGED, BUT WE'RE STILL GIVING THE SAME GREAT SERVICE
The KGB now has a public relations office, conducts press tours of Lubyanka prison, and has turned its anti-dissident unit into the department for the protection of the constitution. It's also started an annual "Miss KGB" contest.

FOUR PERCENT SAID THEY'D MARRY FOR SLURPEES
Fifty-four percent of 7-Eleven customers polled recently said that they'd marry for money.

THE GIVEAWAY WAS THAT, BEFORE STEALING IT, SHE WRESTLED IT TO THE GROUND
Joyce Fletcher, a Secret Service agent assigned to protect Vice President Dan Quayle, was caught shoplifting a ski jacket.

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HOW OUR STUDENTS ARE DOING

To help you make a good decision about whether to sign up for Real Estate, City College wants you to know that, according to the latest information, 132%, or 632 of the 477 students in this program scheduled to graduate in 1988-89 went on to graduate.

(The number of students scheduled to graduate in 1988-89 was defined as 80% of the number of students enrolled in 1987-88. Graduates were defined as the number of students listed as Completers on the 1988-89 NCES 2404-A Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion Report. Because "scheduled to graduate" is a derived number, percentage who graduate may exceed 100%.)

No information is available on the number of students scheduled to graduate in 1989 who found jobs in Real Estate.

I have read and understood the graduation rate and job placement rate information provided above.

Date _____ Prospective student's signature _____

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Slumlord

Pat Moynihan has done some great things—but betraying the poverty warriors isn't one of them

by Nicholas Lemann

In the summer of 1965, the Watts riot and the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam destroyed the mood of triumphant liberal comity that was supposed to be the foundation on which the solution to the crisis in the urban ghettos would be built. The first sign that something had gone profoundly wrong came in the weeks following Watts, when the White House released a report by Daniel Patrick Moynihan called "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." Moynihan, Lyndon Johnson's assistant secretary of labor for policy, had practically invented the role of the social welfare intellectual in government—his job had no operating responsibilities, so he could devote all his energies to generating new ideas. As a thinker, he was not so much profoundly original as he was nimble. He had extraordinary radar that enabled him to pluck significant bits of information out of government reports or scholarly journals and an ability to dramatize his findings in a way that would get the attention of high government officials.

The roots of Moynihan's report lay in a book called *Slavery,* published in 1959 by a young historian named Stanley Elkins. During the years after World War II, historians were just beginning to portray slavery as brutal, rather than benign and paternalistic. Elkins, working in the long shadow of the seminal work in this line, Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution*, wanted to darken the picture of slavery even further by showing that it had so devastated African-Americans as to have reduced them to a state of dependency. His evidence was that slaveholders among the Founding Fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, had portrayed slaves as being childlike, but he didn't really try to prove this

Nicholas Lemann is a national correspondent of The Atlantic *and a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly. *This article is from his book,* The Promised Land, *published by Alfred A. Knopf.*

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assertion, only to offer an explanation supporting it; even the most liberal white historians of the day believed that there had been no such thing as a genuine, strong, African-American slave culture. Elkins compared the effect of slavery on blacks to the infantilization that Bruno Bettelheim had noted in the Jewish inmates of Nazi concentration camps.

When *Slavery* was published, it got respectable reviews and sold at a rate of 400 copies a year. After four years, it abruptly started to catch on. Nathan Glazer, Moynihan's friend and co-author, reviewed *Slavery* in *Commentary* and then gave Moynihan a copy; it became one of Moynihan's discoveries, and he began to pass it around Washington. Besides having the appeal that a dramatic new argument always had for Moynihan, *Slavery* served his political need to justify new social programs run by the Labor Department. "Why?" asks Elkins. "It provided a historical formula that was attractive to northern liberals: Ours was a particularly harsh form of slavery; we had a responsibility to correct it." It was especially important at that moment for liberals to drive home Elkins's point. All through the civil rights movement, liberals were able to argue that although they were supporting a lot of legislation aimed at helping blacks, the overall goal was simply to provide blacks with the same legal rights as everyone else; the second wave of racial reforms, aimed at the North—not just the war on poverty, but also affirmative action—had to be justified on the grounds that blacks deserved help from the government above and beyond what everyone else got.

In his own fashion, Moynihan had done exactly what he so often accused the Left of doing: Claiming to be motivated by concern for the poor, he had set a course whose real aim was to embarrass his enemies.

Moynihan had already, with "One-Third of a Nation"—a report on the growing number of young people who couldn't pass the armed forces induction test—written one sensational document based on what he knew about the problems of the ghettos, and it had failed to loose an avalanche of social programs. He needed new ammunition. Also, he was involved in complex career machinations that a stunning new report might serve. In the fall of 1964, he had campaigned for Robert Kennedy in New York, and Lyndon Johnson, who hated Kennedy, had become predictably furious. Some masterstroke might repair Moynihan's relations with the White House. At the same time, Moynihan was contemplating a run for the presidency of the New York City Council in the fall of 1965; being known as the author of a great liberal call to arms might help his chances there.

Too Pat

During the Christmas season of 1964, Moynihan called in his chief assistant, Paul Barton, one morning. "Pat said, 'We just have to do something,' " Barton says. " 'We have to be different. We're not going to get attention to this problem because of the low unemployment rate. We're going to do a report.' " Moynihan told Barton he wanted to concentrate on the parlous state of the black family. Black out-of-wedlock childbearing had always been very high, and now it appeared to be rising even higher: Nearly a quarter of all black children were now born to single mothers. The standard explanation of this, laid out most convincingly by E. Franklin Frazier and now given additional punch by Elkins, was that slavery had loosened the family bonds of African-Americans. More recently, high unemployment among black men and the welfare system's provision of benefits only to single mothers were making the male economically irrelevant to the poor black family, and more illegitimacy was the result. In *Dark Ghetto*, Kenneth Clark had a gloomy chapter on the deteriorating family structure and social fabric in the black slums, called "The Pathology of the Ghetto"; Moynihan picked up on this, too, and had a chapter in his report called "The Tangle of Pathology."

The work on the report was an all-consuming task in Moynihan's office. All through January and February 1965, Barton and Ellen Broderick, another of Moynihan's assistants, were in the office seven days a week, meeting at the end of every day with Moynihan to apprise him of their progress. Toward the end of the job, they came across a statistic that seemed to encapsulate their theory perfectly: The unemployment rate and the number of new welfare cases, which previ-

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ously had moved up and down in perfect lockstep, had begun to "disaggregate"—unemployment was falling, but welfare cases were rising. (Moynihan, a great reviser of his own history, now says it was the discovery of this statistic that prompted the report—"the numbers went blooey on me," as he puts it.) Finally Moynihan took a detailed outline from his assistants, wrote the report himself, and brought it to his boss, Willard Wirtz, the secretary of labor.

"I remember the almost physical excitement of reading it," Wirtz says. "I said, 'Pat, let's not use this until we can suggest what to do about it.' It was very long on detail about the problem and very short on what to do. He was reluctant—impatient with my suggestions. He wanted to get it out." Moynihan had ideas about how to solve the problems of the black family—for example, reinstituting twice-a-day mail delivery and thereby creating thousands of new jobs for men at the Post Office, that bastion of black working-class employment. He persuaded Wirtz, though, that proposing any specific policies in the report would only diffuse its impact.

A hundred numbered copies of the report were printed and distributed on a confidential basis around the upper reaches of the government. Richard Goodwin, a bright young man of the Kennedy administration who had stayed on after the assassination to become a speechwriter for Johnson, read it and included a passage about the black family in Johnson's commencement address at Howard University, delivered in June 1965. Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young of the Urban League read the address and conferred their blessings on it before it was delivered. Moynihan insists that the report's general release, after Watts, came completely on the initiative of the White House, which needed to satisfy a press corps that was clamoring for some explanation of the riot. But everyone else involved in the report sees the fine hand of Moynihan in its becoming public.

More than most government officials, Moynihan had a pride of authorship and of intellectual discovery that would have made it painful for him to know that he was not getting full credit for an important breakthrough. Just as Johnson needed to pass legislation to prove his own worth, Moynihan needed to be known as an original thinker. Because he was too impatient for the grind of academic research, his oeuvre at that point was quite thin; his chapter on the Irish in *Beyond the Melting Pot* was by far his best-known work, and the report on the black family was the kind of major statement that could establish his place in the first rank of American intellectuals. Well before the release of the Moynihan Report, a lengthy, respectful description of it, obviously written with a copy in hand, appeared in *The New York Times*, the publication most widely circulated in the audience that mattered to Moynihan.

Victimizing the blamer

The press coverage of the Moynihan Report was, in general, exactly what Moynihan had in mind. He was suddenly famous as a racial seer—almost the predictor of the Watts riot. It wasn't until October that it became clear that in black America the report was regarded as a grave insult. The notion of weakness in the black family struck familiar and uncomfortable chords: It brought to mind all the white southern mythology about unrestrained black sexuality. Because Moynihan had left out the solutions, and because the press had concentrated on the parts of the report that dealt with out-of-wedlock childbearing and ignored the parts about unemployment, it was possible to perceive it as a brief for doing nothing to help the black poor, rather than as a "case for national action," because the straits they were in were of their own devising. That was exactly the perception of William Ryan, a white psychologist and civil rights activist in Boston, who, after reading an article in *Newsweek,* wrote a critique of the report that he circulated within the civil rights movement.

Ryan hit upon a brilliant slogan to sum up what he saw Moynihan as doing: "blaming the victim." His actual argument, later expanded into a book called *Blaming the Victim*, was something less than finely tuned—for example, he said that out-of-wedlock childbearing merely looked like a black problem because white illegitimacy was underreported—but the slogan was tremendously influential. It recast the whole long-emerging issue of the social ills of the ghettos as a question of whose fault it was, poor blacks' or white society's. If it was white society's fault, then efforts to acculturate the black poor were beside the point, and offensive; Ryan devoted a chapter of his book to attacking the idea of the culture of poverty for being just another form of blaming the victim. In a matter of weeks after the release of the Moynihan Report, it was impossible to convene a meeting of the leading liberal thinkers on the ghettos that would have the friendly tone of the meetings in early 1964 at which the war on poverty was planned. The subtle differences between liberals and left-liberals became, because of the Moynihan Report and the escalation in Vietnam, a bitter split.

It was still some months before Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, speaking at a rally in the Mississippi Delta town of Greenwood, electrified his audience by leading the chant, "We want black power!" In black

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America, especially among civil rights activists and intellectuals, the Moynihan Report helped to set the stage for that resonant moment. Moynihan, following Elkins, seemed to be denying blacks a usable past. Just at the time when the black privileged classes were struggling to rid themselves of their traditional distaste for the black poor (and by extension for their own blackness), Moynihan was encouraging the public to think of poor blacks as a breed apart. Some civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King, responded to the Moynihan Report in muted tones, but most were furious—even such members of the old guard as Bayard Rustin, and James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality.

Young academics, black and white, set to work producing answers to Moynihan. Historians rewrote the history of slavery to emphasize the strengths of the slaves' families, and sociologists described the female-headed ghetto family as a logical adaptation to conditions there. Black intellectuals used the Moynihan Report as the take-off point for attacking the values of white society in general and of white social scientists and policymakers in particular.

Today the Moynihan Report stands as probably the most refuted document in American history (though its dire predictions about the poor black family all came true). Attacks on it are still being published. The practical effect of the controversy over it was exactly the opposite of what Moynihan intended—all public discussions in mainstream liberal circles of issues like the state of the black family and the culture of poverty simply ceased. Race relations inside the civil rights movement and in the social sciences—supposedly the two main sources of ideas for new racial initiatives directed at the North—continued to worsen.

As for Moynihan, he lost his race in New York and withdrew to academia. He became understandably bitter over the way he had been treated. He, the high government official with the keenest understanding of the problems of the ghettos, the issuer of the direst warnings of the trouble to come; he, who had grown up in a poor, fatherless home himself and knew the pain of it firsthand—he was now being portrayed as, in effect, the Sheriff Clark of the North. "If my head were sticking on a pike at the South West Gate to the White House grounds the impression would hardly be greater," he wrote in 1966 to Harry McPherson, his closest friend in the upper reaches of the Johnson White House.

Moynihan continued to present himself as the champion of a government policy to keep families together—he began calling for the establishment of a Western Europe-style "family allowance" under which every American family, regardless of need, would get a government grant—but he stopped mentioning the racial component of the family issue. As he wrote to McPherson, "Obviously one can no longer address oneself to the subject of the Negro family as such." In a combative moment after his report was published, he contracted to write a book on the black family, but he dropped that project. He began to develop a new preoccupation besides social policy: the danger posed to the American polity by the left, as demonstrated by the reaction to his report. In 1967, he wrote an article for *Commentary* called "The President & the Negro: The Moment Lost," in which he blamed the attacks on the report for dissipating the political consensus for healing the ghettos that had built up by the summer of 1965. "The liberal Left can be as rigid and destructive as any force in American life," he wrote.

Ordinarily, when a government official leaves Washington in a hail of criticism, his inevitable sour musings afterward are interesting but not important. Moynihan's case was different. His bitterness mattered a great deal, because, unlike everyone he served with in the two Democratic administrations of the sixties, he would be back in power.

The odd couple

Moynihan's wide range of contacts included many Republicans, and his writing and thinking after the furor over his report on the black family became markedly more conservative; when Richard Nixon's presidency began, he landed a job on the White House staff as chief advisor on urban affairs. Moynihan retained his membership in the Democratic party, but he saw his future in it as bleak. "I have been an active Democrat, and if they allow me (which alas I doubt) I will be one again," he wrote to H. R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff, in 1969. His service to Nixon was not, to his mind, a brief bipartisan interlude in his career, but a crucial opportunity to affect the direction of the government. Never before had he even approached the influence he came to have in the Nixon administration, when for a time he truly had the ear of the president. Even during his current career as a Democratic senator from New York, he has had much less influence on policymaking than he did in 1969 and 1970.

It was on the surface an odd pairing, Moynihan and Nixon. Moynihan was entirely preoccupied with the issue of race in the North—his service in three successive administrations made him the one person most continuously involved in formulating the government's response to the great migration of five million blacks to the northern cities during and after World War II. The political calculations of the Nixon

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administration didn't include blacks, whom Nixon had conceded to the Democrats. As Moynihan reminded Nixon in March 1969, he attained the presidency having won probably the smallest percentage of black votes of any president in American history.

Very occasionally Nixon entertained wistful hopes of discovering a contingent of blacks who would vote for him—"30 percent who are potentially on our side," he once scribbled on the margin of a memo—but on the whole he was far too much the realist to believe that he would ever have a significant black constituency, and he knew that some of his white support came from people who were voting on the basis of their resentment of blacks. "There were subliminal racial messages in a lot of Nixon's campaigning," says John Ehrlichman, Nixon's chief domestic policy advisor. "It was subtler than code words. It was, 'I am on your side. I am going to deal with it in a way you'll approve of.' I know he saw Johnson's embrace of blacks as an opportunity. He exploited it." Ehrlichman says that on two occasions, Nixon told him that he considered blacks to be less intelligent than whites. "He thought, basically, blacks were genetically inferior," Ehrlichman says.

The memos that Moynihan sent Nixon were filled with small bouquets: "your great Inaugural Address"; "your brilliant first year in office"; "What you have done for racial equality is without equal in American history."

The real link between Moynihan and Nixon, the obsession they shared, was a deep dislike of the left-liberal political culture that had grown so dramatically in the past three or four years and reached its height of influence during Nixon's first years in office. Both men had been through, and been deeply wounded by, the experience of being reviled by the Left. As early as 1966, Moynihan was writing to Harry McPherson, "I have the feeling that you fellows, being southern populist types do not understand the northern Left," and since then his views on the subject had only grown more pronounced. It was easy for Moynihan to conjure up for Nixon a nightmarish picture of Nixon-haters (who were also no doubt Moynihan-haters): Ivy League professors, black-power advocates, social-change-promoting foundation executives, peace-marching Georgetown hostesses, affluent student revolutionaries, and to-the-barricades journalists. While reading a description by Moynihan of Leonard Bernstein's fundraising party for the Black Panthers in 1970, Nixon wrote a note to himself: "The complete decadence of the American upper-class intellectual elite." There was a close connection between these people and racial issues: In domestic politics, race was the means they would use to heap abuse on Nixon.

Moynihan, probably more than Nixon, came to see the Left as a threat not just to him personally but to the basic social peace of the country. Unlike Nixon, Moynihan viewed the United States from the vantage point of a position within the intellectual subculture, where the Left was a far more significant force than it was in national life generally, and his natural tendency toward overdramatization made him quick to perceive crises anyway. From where he sat, the state of the nation in those days of Kent State and Cambodia and My Lai seemed extremely dire. In May 1970, he reported to Nixon that the Students for a Democratic Society had threatened to burn down his house in Cambridge and that his family had gone into hiding. ("Even so, I'm sticking here," he wrote. "I am choosing the interests of the administration over the interests of my children.") Later that year Moynihan told Nixon that 10-year-old John Moynihan was afraid his father would be assassinated. Moynihan believed that the overarching purpose of the Nixon administration had to be the Lincolnesque one of preserving the union. He wrote to Nixon just before his inauguration: "Your task, then, is clear: to restore the authority of American institutions. Not, certainly, under that name, but with a clear sense that what is at issue is the continued acceptance by the great mass of people of the legitimacy and efficacy of the present arrangements of American society." This would necessarily be a matter of political self-preservation for Nixon, as well as statesmanship. As Moynihan wrote to Nixon the following year, "To be blunt, the people who brought down Johnson want to bring down Nixon."

Other people in the administration shared some of Nixon's hurts and resentments, but Moynihan had a special influence. Like Henry Kissinger on the foreign policy side, he had the ability, rare among high government officials and prized by Nixon, to put the activities of the administration in a sweeping historical context. "He's so stimulating," Nixon told

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Ehrlichman once. Moynihan was brimming with ideas for grand initiatives (a constitutional convention in 1976, a Nixon architectural policy, a new federal Department of Higher Education and Research) and with interesting predictions (feminism as a major social force, a series of urban fiscal crises). He could explain to Nixon the similarities between his situation and that of other distinguished figures he knew Nixon admired: Lincoln, Roosevelt, Wilson, Churchill. Nixon could discuss with Moynihan, as he could not with Haldeman or Ehrlichman, his admiration for Disraeli and for *War and Peace*. In the early days the relationship was suffused with praise; each man knew well what the other liked to hear. "It is reassuring to have a true intellectual in residence," Nixon wrote Moynihan in 1969, and a few months later he said, perhaps sensing Moynihan's restlessness with university life, "You belong in the exciting things." He reassured Moynihan that he wanted peace in Vietnam, and Moynihan usually expressed his opposition to the war as gently as possible.

Ehrlichman says Nixon told him that he considered blacks to be less intelligent than whites. "He thought, basically, blacks were genetically inferior."

The memos that Moynihan often sent Nixon were filled with small bouquets: "your great Inaugural Address"; "your brilliant first year in office"; "What you have done for racial equality is without equal in American history"; "New Federalism is generally held [in England, where Moynihan had just been] to be the most important domestic initiative since the New Deal." Moynihan's flattery (and self-flattery—the presidential ideas he extolled were often the ones he had thought of) had a higher purpose: He used it, successfully, to help coax Nixon into agreement with his vision of what the administration should do. Nearly all the great presidential initiatives he wrote to Nixon about were meant, in Moynihan's mind, to send a message—not to average voters or foreign leaders or any of the other standard objects of symbolic presidential actions, but to intellectuals. Actually bringing them around to a position of support for Nixon, which Nixon thought of as part of Moynihan's job, Moynihan realized was, in 1969 and 1970, impossible. But they could be neutralized, he thought, through a kind of one-upsmanship: If Nixon built up a record of liberal accomplishment, it would become clear that the intellectuals' attacks on him were based not on any substantive objection to his policies, but on pure destructiveness. In the end they would be discredited, which was a necessary precondition of the moral restoration of the republic.

Nixon: big-spending liberal

Nixon instinctively disliked the war on poverty. Two months after taking office, he wrote Ehrlichman, "No increase in any poverty program until more evidence is in"; on another memo, which listed all the presidential appointees at the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), he wrote, "I want immediate action on all these characters." Moynihan might have been expected to urge Nixon to follow his inclination to put the OEO out of business; at the time, he was probably the best-known critic of the war on poverty in the country, having published in 1969 a book attacking community action called *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*. He sent Nixon a positive review of the book in January 1969, with a note saying "Wait till the OEO types get to me!" "Very intriguing—!" Nixon wrote back.

And yet Moynihan's position was exactly the opposite: In the first few months of the administration, he was responsible for persuading Nixon to spare the OEO—for strategic reasons, not because he considered it an effective government agency. Why give the Left any ammunition? "Avoid at whatever immediate costs . . . an enormous controversy over the 'war on poverty,'" he wrote Nixon a month after the inauguration, and in a new introduction to *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, written in early 1970, he proudly reported that all suspicions that Nixon harbored ill will toward the poverty program had been shown to be nonsense. Moynihan's entire record as an advisor to Nixon is one of always pushing him to make liberal gestures, great (like more government spending on social programs) and small (like restoring the funds that Johnson had cut for Robert Kennedy's memorial at Arlington and granting a passport to the widow of W. E. B. Du Bois), and always making the case for them primarily on the basis of the need to neutralize the intellectual Left.

It helped Moynihan that the general tenor of the American establishment during the first Nixon administration was probably more liberal than it had ever been before and than it has been since. Conservatism of the variety that prevailed during Ronald Reagan's presidency was a fringe ideology in the ear-

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ly seventies, and Nixon would have had to wage all-out war against the Congress, the press, the universities, the foundations, and even most corporate leaders if he had wanted to reverse completely the rising tide of social welfare programs. His real area of interest was foreign policy, and he was not inclined to expend his political capital on trying to bring about a conservative counterrevolution in domestic affairs.

Among his advisors, the people who would qualify as conservative by today's standards consistently lost their battles with the forces of moderate Republicanism. As one of Nixon's aides, Richard Nathan, puts it, "We just didn't have a new conventional wisdom—we accepted the paradigm of the Great Society." In the course of Nixon's first term, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare pushed forward with many school desegregation cases in the South. The Labor Department established the use of numerical goals in affirmative action plans. Under pressure from the Democratic Congress, Nixon signed into law a program to create temporary jobs in the ghettos, a subsidized housing program, revenue sharing and block grants for cities, increases in welfare payments, a major expansion of the food stamps program, and a new program under Social Security that made payments to disabled people. That period in the past, now so often mentioned in conservative political speeches, when we threw money at our problem was really the first Nixon administration more than it was either of the Democratic administrations of the sixties.

The FAP flap

Moynihan's vision for the Nixon administration was far too ambitious for him to limit himself to ensuring that the government simply float along on a liberal tide. He had an idea in mind that would dramatically establish a new course for American social policy: a national guaranteed-income program called the Family Assistance Plan.

For years Moynihan had been advocating some kind of new government income support for families, and more recently, the idea of a guaranteed income had moved steadily into the forefront of his opinions, and the idea of full employment and jobs programs into the background. During the Nixon administration, "Moynihan was not pushing strongly for an employment solution," Ehrlichman says. The strategic advantages of a guaranteed-income program, at that moment, were many. For a substantial initiative, it was quite inexpensive. It would replace something that nobody liked, the welfare system. It was easy to sell to Nixon: It was an antipoverty program that did not require venturing into such perilous territory as promoting integration or expanding the federal bureaucracy; as Moynihan presented the idea, it would cost only $2 billion a year and cut back on the size of government by consolidating the vast Democratic hodgepodge of federal income-support programs.

Additional attractions of the Family Assistance Plan lay in areas that could not be publicly discussed. The subject of black out-of-wedlock childbearing was still strictly verboten—"You weren't supposed to talk about that," says Richard Nathan—but the percentage of black children born to single mothers was continuing to rise. If the welfare system was to blame, then the Family Assistance Plan, which would give money to intact families as well as female-headed ones, would reverse the trend. Another trend it might reverse was the black migration to the North. For several years it had occurred to government officials that the crisis in the ghettos might be solved by finding a way to keep rural southern blacks from moving to the cities. Toward the end of his presidency, Johnson set up a secret Interagency Task Force on Rural-Urban Migration to look into this question, and in 1969 Moynihan set up a White House task force on "Internal Migration." At Moynihan's urging, Nixon said in his 1970 State of the Union address, "We must create a new rural environment which will not only stem the migration to urban centers but reverse it."

Their efforts always foundered for the simple reason that, upon investigation, it became clear that the great migration was already coming to an end. By the late sixties, the dislocations caused by the mechanization of cotton cultivation in the South were substantially complete, and the word was out in the black South that the northern ghettos had become short on unskilled jobs and long on street crime. To people in Washington, though, it appeared that the tremendous disparities in the level of welfare benefits from state to state—Illinois consistently paid from three to four times what Mississippi did—were inducing poor blacks to move north just to get on welfare there. The Family Assistance Plan would establish a national uniform benefit level and so remove that incentive. Although Moynihan now stoutly denies that he believed the Family Assistance Plan would stem the black migration, the original proposal for it said, "No more will poor persons be driven out of one section of the Nation by inadequate or even punitive welfare legislation, and forced into crowded and hostile cities." When Nixon made his first speech about the plan, he said the welfare system "has helped draw millions into the slums of our cities." In *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income*, Moynihan's book on the Family Assistance Plan, published in

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1973, he approvingly quoted an article from *The Economist* that said, "A major requirement here is to get deserted welfare mothers and their large families out of the city centers instead of ridiculously saying that they can draw higher benefits only if they stay there."

Perhaps the most appealing of all the nonobvious features of the Family Assistance Plan was that it would cut out of the action the kind of social welfare employees who Moynihan and Nixon felt were the Left's main entering wedge into the government. In Moynihan's formulation, the Family Assistance Plan represented the administration's embracing an "income strategy" against poverty to replace Johnson's "services strategy." One member of the White House staff remembers that at the first big meeting where Moynihan proposed the plan, when he said that it would eliminate tens of thousands of social workers from the federal payroll, Nixon's eyes lit up. As Moynihan imagined his proposal playing out, the Left would be inescapably trumped: it would of course be horrified by the Family Assistance Plan as a matter of self-interest, but to work actively for the defeat of the most sweeping liberal social initiative in years would appear hypocritical. This logic appealed to Nixon, too. On Christmas Eve, 1969, an assistant of Moynihan's named John Price had to pay a brief visit to the Oval Office, and he found Nixon in a voluble mood. Price says, "Nixon said, 'We as Republicans have to accept that the Democrats will always try to raise the payments from a guaranteed income and make us look mean. But the important thing is this:'—he pointed his finger at me—'*We established the principle*!'"

The plan twice failed to pass in Congress. The opposition that sealed its fate came from conservative southern Democrats, most importantly Senator Russell Long of Louisiana. To Moynihan's mind, though, the real villains were the left-wing organizations (such as the Welfare Rights Organization) that, contrary to his expectations, decided to campaign actively against the plan. The defeat of the Family Assistance Plan deepened his conviction that the Left had become the main obstacle to the achievement of liberal goals in America.

In 1973, when he was ambassador to India, Moynihan wrote to Melvin Laird, who had taken over his portfolio at the White House, to urge a third try for the Family Assistance Plan; his argument makes it clear how much more focused he was on the plan as an intellectual gambit than as a social program. It would not pass, he wrote, because "*a guaranteed income will never be enacted while President Nixon is in office*." Still, the fight was worth it, because the plan was not "addressed to the poor" but "*addressed to the cultural strata*"—that is, it was meant to vitiate the arguments of intellectuals who liked to portray the Nixon administration as heedlessly right-wing. As to the objection of people like Burns and Long that the plan would encourage welfare dependency, Moynihan's attitude was, essentially, that they might be right, but so what? Reducing dependency wasn't the point. A large welfare-dependent class "will come to be accepted as the normal and manageable cost of doing urban business," he wrote Laird. "It is in ways a political subsidy, as irrational perhaps as those paid to owners of oil wells, wheat fields, or aerospace companies, but whoever said politics was rational? Not Melvin Laird!"

Moynihan was occasionally able to induce Nixon to get into the spirit of bitterness about the liberal opposition to the Family Assistance Plan. In 1970, he wrote to him, "Can you believe the Urban League would be against FAP? Talk about class interests." This prompted a handwritten response from Nixon to Moynihan, Ehrlichman, and Haldeman, with each man getting a message custom-tailored to the nature of his relationship with the president:

"Pat—Good job! (However I'm not surprised at the Urban League getting 'political' as November approaches.)"

"E—I think this cooks Whitney Young. He is hopelessly partisan."

"H—Can't some of our people who help finance the Urban League hit him? See if you can't get someone on this."

On the whole, though, Nixon was losing interest in the plan; as a politician in office, he could not afford to be so utterly consumed as Moynihan was with the thrust and parry of intellectual life. By the late summer of 1970, Ehrlichman's notes have Nixon telling him, "Just get something done. . . . Let it appear we've fought and come half way. . . . Avoid appearance of defeat." It was especially unfortunate for the Family Assistance Plan's standing with Nixon that the Democratic presidential nominee, George McGovern, whom Nixon regarded as a dreamy, ineffectual leftist, proposed a guaranteed income during his campaign in 1972. At one point, while discussing McGovern's plan with Ehrlichman, Nixon called in his faithful manservant, Manolo Sanchez. If McGovern won and implemented his plan, Sanchez said, according to Ehrlichman's notes, "I quit—go on welfare."

Left out

Moynihan knew exactly what was going on in black America. He had seen for years that the black poor in the cities were in trouble—that their unem-

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ployment rate was rising alarmingly, that their family networks were becoming more unstable, that their likelihood of going on welfare was increasing, that crime in their neighborhoods was growing more and more severe. More recently, he had realized that the growth in government employment was a great boon to the black middle class, and that as more blacks began to do better, the poor people in the ghettos would be cut off. It would seem that somebody who saw all these trends taking place would conclude that the worst possible answer for the problems of black America at that moment was concentrating on higher welfare payments at the expense of programs: That would cut off the growth of the social service jobs that were giving blacks their main avenue of opportunity without giving any additional jobs, education, or training that might help the poorest people to get out of the ghettos. That Moynihan, knowing what he knew, put all his political chips on a guaranteed income is testament to the ability of his preoccupation with the Left to distract him from what should have been the real point of his service in the White House.

In March 1969, just when he was beginning to promote the Family Assistance Plan, Moynihan wrote a long memo to Nixon, filled with urgent, italicized warnings, on the state of race relations in America—a memo that would've gotten him in much more trouble than his notorious memo urging Nixon to treat racial issues with "benign neglect." It demonstrates the line of reasoning that was pulling Moynihan away from the idea of giving blacks more government programs, and toward giving them more welfare instead.

Moynihan began the memo by stressing the need for "the integration into the larger society of what is now a sizable urban lower class which at the moment is experiencing more than its share of the bad habits and bad luck which through history have affected such groups and caused them to be seen as 'different' or undesirable by their more prudent and fortunate neighbors. . . . The Negro lower class would appear to be unusually self-damaging, that is to say, more so than is normal for such groups." He went on to show how mixed his feelings were about the new black middle class, because of its political leanings:

> The Negro poor having become more openly violent—especially in the form of the rioting of the mid-sixties—they have given the black middle class an incomparable weapon with which to threaten white America. This has been for many an altogether intoxicating experience. "Do this or the cities will burn." And of course they have been greatly encouraged in this course by white rhetoric of the Kerner Commission variety. But most important of all, the existence of a large marginal, if not dependent, black urban lower class has at last given the black middle class an opportunity to establish a secure and rewarding power base in American society—as the provider of social services to the black lower class. . . . What building contracts and police graft were to the 19th-century urban Irish, the welfare department, Head Start, and black studies programs will be to the coming generation of Negroes. They are of course very wise in this respect. These are expanding areas of economic opportunity. By contrast, black business enterprise offers relatively little. In all this there will be the peculiar combination of weakness and strength that characterizes Negro Americans as a group at this time. . . . There is no true Negro intellectual or academic class at this moment. (Thirty years ago there was: Somehow it died out.) Negro books are poor stuff for the most part. Black studies are by and large made up of the worst kind of ethnic longings-for-a-glorious-past. . . .

Helping the ghettos would, Moynihan continued, deprive "the militant middle class" of the ability to make an ongoing "threat to the larger society, much as the desperate bank robber threatens to drop the vial of nitroglycerin." Hence the income strategy: a gesture toward the ghettos that would simultaneously take the play from the militant middle class.

Although the Family Assistance Plan as a specific program failed politically, the general principle it embodied succeeded. The Nixon administration in effect did implement the income strategy by greatly increasing the payment levels of welfare, food stamps, Social Security, and disability pensions, while allowing government social welfare employment to level off. At the same time, the proportion of blacks in poverty, which decreased from 55 percent in 1959 to 32 percent in 1969, also leveled off and has stayed relatively level ever since, lacking a decisive nudge from either the manual-labor economy or the federal government. In his own fashion Moynihan had done exactly what he so often accused the Left of doing: Claiming to be motivated by concern for the poor, he had set a course whose real aim was to embarrass his enemies, one that was not in the best interest of the people he was supposed to be helping.

Callous aforethought

After Nixon's landslide victory in the 1972 presidential election, a moment had passed in American history—or, to use the phrase Moynihan coined to describe the events that followed the publication of his report on the black family, a moment was lost. Race remained, and will remain, one of the obsessive

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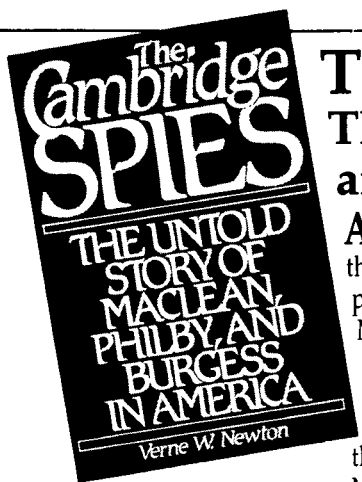
themes of American life, but the period when it was the central domestic concern of the federal government seemed to be over. The presidential electorate had become essentially Republican. Within liberal circles, race now had to share the domestic agenda with other causes, like environmentalism. The summer riots had tailed off, and therefore so had the idea that the condition of the ghettos threatened the country as a whole. After the OPEC oil embargo of 1973, the national sense that there was enough economic breathing space to allow for the contemplation of expensive social reforms evaporated.

Over time, the tenuous nature of the war on poverty faded from memory; it began to seem that the government had tried everything to help the ghettos, spending untold billions, and that nothing had worked. David Stockman, driving William Greider of *The Washington Post* through the poor black section in his hometown of Benton Harbor, Michigan, just before taking charge of domestic policy in the Reagan administration, said, "I wouldn't be surprised if $100 million had been spent here in the last 20 years. Urban renewal, CETA, Model Cities, they've had everything. And the results? No impact whatever."

But we hadn't tried everything. We never tried making Head Start a universal program, or expanding it beyond the preschool years. We never tried the kind of major public works program that the Labor Department pushed for in the sixties. We never tried putting enough police on foot patrol in the ghettos to make a real dent in the disastrous level of crime there. We never replaced the welfare system with something designed to get poor people into the mainstream of society.

Of the billions the federal government spent, by far the lion's share went to the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and the hungry, and in all those areas the problems it addressed were substantially solved. The black middle class grew faster during the Great Society period than at any other time in American history. One of the things we did try, community action, which used up most of the war on poverty's political capital, was an idea that couldn't possibly have accomplished what it was supposed to; and all the federal efforts in the ghettos took place during a uniquely difficult time for liberal initiatives aimed at racial problems.

Nonetheless, the idea endures that anything the federal government might do for the black poor will surely fail, and it has become a powerful force in its own right; misapprehensions about the past have a way of determining the future. □



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Verne W. Newton is a Washington researcher, filmmaker, and former Executive Secretary of the Agency for International Development in the State Department.

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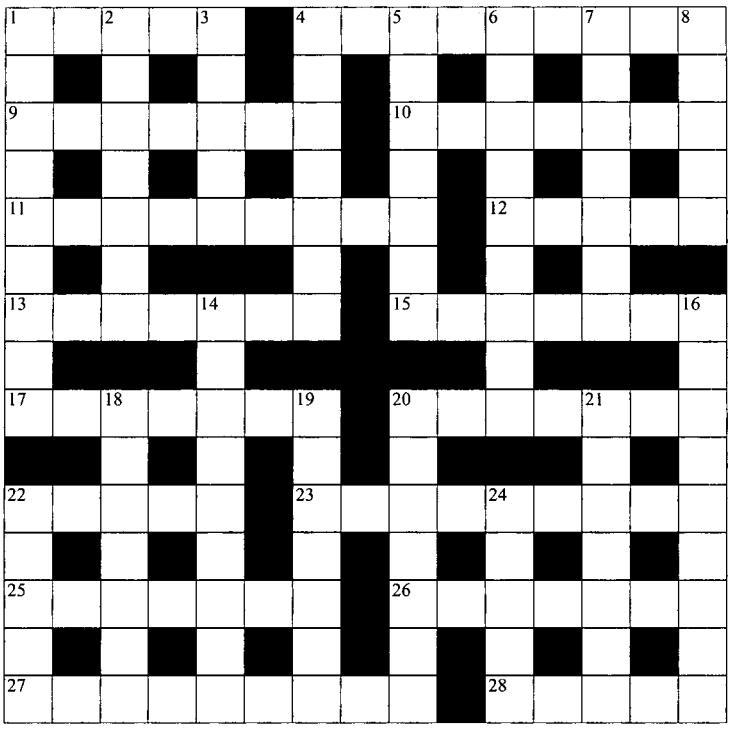
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g., USA, are treated as one word.



ACROSS

1. Orally part of undisturbed state. (5)
4. Mix on some 199 fiscal facts. (9)
9. Like a gem turning in one pail. (7)
10. Kitchen utensil is somehow airy, etc. (3,4)
11. Necessary to figure sines, *et al.* (9)
12. Missouri-style building in Texas? (5)
13. Plans for messy street pick up. (7)
15. Mates would be advocates after end of June. (7)
17. Doubly processed involving cruder energy. (7)
20. Sinecure developed base joy. (4,3)
22. Highway bad in the middle is not flat. (5)
23. National policy made truant sit awkwardly. (4.5)
25. To be alive, change to B train after five . . . (7)
26. . . . or for Irish hero change to street train. (7)
27. Struggles to preserve 250 tins of jam. (9)
28. Body in the buff or cellophane. (5)

DOWN

1. Computer-harvested rose crops. (9)
2. Collects Adlai around service. (7)
3. Spa in the other direction is simple. (5)
4. Idly see show as these parts part. (7)
5. Looser gathering around one nine. (7)
6. Mustered troops are at the control panel. (9)
7. Made raids on raids. (7)
8. Just so any arrangement follows. (3,2)
14. Ally flare exposed anachronistic weather. (5,4)
16. Important drug? (9)
18. Inca lab developed tempestuous character. (7)
19. Item in Alexandra's tickler file is quite severe. (7)
20. A tse-tse fly lands. (7)
21. Change of leadership after January 1 for combatant. (7)
22. Begin having small business come back for disaster. (5)
24. Criminal if the letters are revised. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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The Toughest Row to Hoe

Nicholas Lemann takes us to the ghettos like no one else has. Now, how the hell do we get out?

by Matthew Cooper

There's no miniseries, not yet anyway. But Nicholas Lemann's new book* has all the trappings of a major publishing event. His account of the black migration north has been featured on the covers of both *The New York Times Magazine* and *The New York Times Book Review*. Critics as politically diverse as George Will and Garry Wills have hailed it as a "classic of contemporary history" and "indispensable."

Not surprisingly, this response delights those of us affiliated with *The Washington Monthly*. Lemann may make his living as a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, but he's also a former editor of this magazine and among its most prolific contributors. (Conflict-of-interest check: Lemann and I are just acquaintances.) But in the flood of reviews, many of his book's strengths and even a few weaknesses have been overlooked.

On the weakness side of the equation, Lemann has left a lot unanswered about the origins of the underclass and hasn't shown us how we can really help the poor. His great unheralded strength comes from approaching his subject in so many ways—as historian, reporter, and anthropologist. By wearing many different hats, he's jarred our assumptions about well-worn topics like what life is like in the ghetto and how the war on poverty was waged. (He's certainly done that in his revisionist portrait of a familiar figure, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, beginning on page 39.)

To understand what kind of culture five million blacks brought north after 1940—a migration larger than that of the Italians or Jews—Lemann went south to Clarksdale, Mississippi, the point of departure for the families he follows. With a reporter's shoe leather and an academic's ability to grasp technical studies—

Matthew Cooper is the Atlanta bureau chief for U.S. News & World Report *and a contributing editor of* The Washington Monthly.

**The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America.* Nicholas Lemann. *Alfred A. Knopf, $24.95.*

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including page-turners like *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy: Summary of Field Studies and Statistical Surveys 1933-35*—Lemann reveals a sharecropper culture rife with drunkenness, illegitimacy, and other problems fueled by racism. White planters, for instance, would usually cheat their black tenants, who would, in turn, reasonably try to "hustle" the whites by, say, picking cotton in a slipshod manner that allowed them to earn more when their harvests were weighed. Combining reporting and history, Lemann follows this ethic north where, he argues, it got worse. He notes how E. Franklin Frazier, the black sociologist, spied this hustling—"getting over," it was called—as early as the fifties. Yet Lemann gives us the ground-level view, too, by following Ruby Haynes, whose sad story ties the book together. For Ruby, Mississippi (to which she would eventually return) and Chicago were equally ridden with crime, poverty, and bad men.

To understand why policymakers failed the migrants, Lemann excavated presidential archives and the memories of veterans of Washington's war on poverty. In doing so he disabuses us of the conservative myth that government did everything it could to help the poor. On the contrary, Washington elites, convinced that prosperity was preordained, were myopic about the black ghetto problem until the early sixties, when the migration was almost over. John Kenneth Galbraith, for one, mentioned race just once in his emblematic 1958 work, *The Affluent Society*. When poverty programs were initiated under John Kennedy, they were undergirded by a shaky notion—community action programs run by the poor themselves. Lemann the historian shows how these ill-tested programs grew wildly under Lyndon Johnson. "It's not big enough!" Sargent Shriver, LBJ's top poverty warrior, would shout at his staff. Head Start may have worked, but many community-based programs were short on accountability and long on radical politics. A typical Lemann gem is his hysterical account of the patrician Shriver negotiating with the Blackstone Rangers, a murderous Chicago gang that received community action funds.

If Lemann's freshest material is his work on government, his most moving is his reporting from the Chicago slums, especially the story of Ruby Haynes, who lived for more than a quarter century in the mammoth Robert Taylor Homes. Life at Robert Taylor—arson and drugs, illegitimacy and welfare—seems familiar from newspaper headlines. But by writing about this ghetto with the painstaking detail of an anthropologist, Lemann convinces you of something truly startling: It's even worse than you thought. Lemann argues that American ghettos have become some of the worst places to live in the world, if not by monetary measures, then by the standard of sheer chaos. This is how Lemann describes a rite of passage for Ruby's son Robert: "[He] lost his virginity at the age of 9 . . . courtesy of a 12-year-old girl in the building who initiated his brother Johnnie and another friend at the same time, each one taking his turns while the others held the stairwell doors shut." This dispassionate prose doesn't glamorize or demonize those living in the ghettos but makes them wholly sympathetic in a way that a newspaper story never could.

Migration headaches

Notably, Lemann says that any attacks on poverty should be head on, not camouflaged in big entitlement programs for the poor, as many liberals often urge. For that to work, however, consciences will have to be pricked. And by simply laying out what goes on in the ghetto, without mawkish rhetoric, Lemann has shown that the story of today's underclass can be rendered honestly and yet in a way that can provoke people to help. Indeed, on a subject that fuels the passions, Lemann is among the least polemical writers around. Even when he's skewering people like Moynihan or the conservative Charles Murray, his writing has a give-them-their-due quality that makes it both admirable and all the more devastating. By contrast, *The Promised Land* has plenty of characters, like Robert Kennedy, who found themselves unfairly mau-maued during the sixties. In fact, Lemann has been through some of that himself. His alleged crime: embracing a kind of cultural determinism that condemns blacks to a miserable future because of their sharecropping past. The charge is spurious, but it's still to Lemann's credit that he hasn't had some bristling, neoconservative reaction. He's managed, instead, to retain a tone that's liberal and charitable.

When it comes to the question of how to help the poor, Lemann has some good ideas. He makes a convincing case that programs designed to save neighborhoods, rather than individuals, are doomed. Trendy conservative bromides like enterprise zones hold out little more promise than discredited liberal solutions like community action because ghettos are too big and far gone to be helped by them—a fact that the upwardly mobile poor, black or white, have always intuitively understood as they packed their bags for better neighborhoods. He also makes the familiar but timely point that affirmative action—a topic that has consumed so much of the energy and efforts of civil rights groups—does nothing for poor people like Ruby Haynes.

Lemann's best recommendation is to screen public housing applicants. Not without reason, the notion of deeming some people unworthy of government bene-

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fits makes a lot of liberals uneasy. It summons up Dickensian images of the poorhouse or of some turn-of-the-century settlement-house lady doling out thin gruel. In the 1960s, the ACLU saw an abridgement of rights in the screening requirements used by the Robert Taylor Homes. They had them overturned. But Lemann shows that elementary standards—such as giving building managers the muscle to kick out unruly tenants without unduly complex proceedings—aren't cruel; in fact, they're the only way to help those on their way up. Ruby has left the projects, but her daughter-in-law, Connie, is still there. She's as close to "model poor" as you can get. Her daughter, a high school valedictorian, won a new Chrysler courtesy of *Jet* magazine and sold it to help pay for college. But Connie's efforts to get ahead are constantly jeopardized by the other tenants. Her daughters are taunted as "bitches" because they do their schoolwork. More ominously, gangs try to shanghai her son into membership. Even social workers won't visit the Robert Taylor Homes. Without filtering, the projects have become a place where those who do the right thing barely survive. Of course, screening alone won't solve all problems—one of Ruby's sons was kicked out of the Navy and wound up destitute for a time—but it would make life easier for those who try to get ahead.

Lemann aid

With the exception of a few novel notions, though, Lemann's prescriptions aren't very compelling, certainly not when compared to his descriptions. That failure is somewhat ironic given that Lemann skewers Moynihan for failing to add lengthy recommendations to his famed 1965 report on the black family—recommendations that Lemann says would have spared Moynihan the charge that he was "blaming the victim" and would have allowed the country to sensibly debate the disintegration of the black family rather than shunting it aside for a generation. Instead, Lemann confines his thoughts to a small "afterword," an awkward compromise between adding a thorough set of recommendations and skipping them entirely. In it he calls for another antipoverty crusade. Its goal is to ensure that "every ghetto child is born healthy, learns to read and write in elementary school, graduates from high school, gets trained for the job market as it now exists, puts off parenthood . . . and has a job waiting at the end of the process." Lemann's concession to the daunting nature of this challenge is that it would require "painstaking, detailed work." But he may be short-shrifting the difficulty. First, the political problems associated with launching a new war on poverty may be even greater than he allows. One need only look at *The Promised Land* itself. Had Lemann elaborated on his poverty proposals, chances are good that the conservative-liberal consensus that this is a great book would have been shattered.

Beyond politics, there are intellectual hurdles that we have yet to clear. It's true that we now know, as Lemann points out, that food stamps really do stem hunger and that Head Start helps children, at least in the early years. One could add that poverty among the elderly can be virtually abolished since their benefits can be hiked without fear of creating a disincentive to work. But many social woes still baffle scholars. How can we ensure that a ghetto youth "puts off parenthood" when no one really knows why so many adolescents, despite the availability of abortion and contraception and the obvious perils of unwed parenthood, nevertheless choose to bear children out of wedlock? Indeed, after Lemann's exhaustive and beautifully rendered treatment of the Haynes clan, it's still a mystery why their behavior has such a self-destructive cast. Conversely, we don't know why most blacks managed to migrate quite nicely from the sharecropping culture into the middle class while others seemed to be stymied by the social baggage of the plantation. Perhaps we can make progress of the kind Lemann hopes for, but it's going to take much more intellectual firepower than we as a society have thus far brought to bear.

There's just a lot we don't know. For instance, it's impossible to read *The Promised Land* and not be convinced that there's some link between the sharecropping culture and what we see in today's ghettos. But the connection is perhaps not as strong as Lemann suggests. Other ethnic groups, notably Puerto Ricans, suffer from some of the same woes, and yet they don't hail from a sharecropping culture. What accounts for their plight? Urban Institute economist Ronald Mincy estimates that non-Hispanic whites constitute 28 percent of the underclass in cities of less than a million. Clearly, then, there are forces forming the underclass that are not explained by the sharecropping experience or by the migration north or even by the black experience.

Yet the complexity of those forces gets buried in Lemann's narrative technique of focusing on a few families. While it's an elegant device for giving us a sense of how the migration affected real people, it skews the sample. Since Lemann concentrates largely on Ruby Haynes's odyssey from the very worst of the South to, arguably, the very worst and most isolated of all public housing projects, it's not all that surprising that he would find a strong connection between yesterday's sharecropping and today's underclass. But what about other cities—say, Los Angeles—that were less of a terminus for black migrants? A story about a family in the Watts underclass who migrated from South to East to West might read quite differently. Le-

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mann, of course, isn't obliged to tell the story of every black family; but neither does he flag the fact that the families he's chosen to follow are representative of just one part of the great migration.

Other issues also go unresolved. Lemann's notion of migrants-lost-in-the-wilderness defies what we know about other immigrant groups—that they're likely to be the pluckiest, best-off members of a particular group. And when it comes to statistical evidence, Lemann presents conflicting data. Some numbers support the contention that black migrants to the North fared worse than those born there; others don't.

Again, Lemann deserves applause for exploring the sharecropping-ghetto connection, a link few commentators have adequately considered—though Lemann is hardly the first to spot it. W. E. B. Du Bois's 1899 tract, *The Philadelphia Negro*, is just one of many works dealing with the woes of sharecroppers come north. *The Promised Land* explains a lot, but it also demonstrates that the ghetto's genesis remains murky.

The paradox of *The Promised Land* is that it simultaneously saddens and gives hope. By explaining some of how we got to our current racial woes, it demystifies our despair over depressing headlines. If daily crime and poverty stories weren't disheartening enough, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* recently ran a report that reminds us how far our racial problems extend: Black car dealers, it turns out, are disproportionately hurt by the recession. Still, it's worth noting that black car dealers exist at all. As Lemann so rightly observes, 40 years ago no one, not even the most starry-eyed liberal, could have imagined that blacks would, for the most part, be a northern, urban, and middle-class people. Sharecropping once seemed indispensable, so too segregation. Lemann doesn't delve into it, but one need only think of the Irish, whose condition once seemed equally hopeless. As the economist Thomas Sowell notes, in 1890, 42 percent of the Irish were servants. As recently as 1914, half of the Irish families on Manhattan's West Side were fatherless. (That favorite son of Hell's Kitchen, Pat Moynihan, was raised in a fatherless home.) The Irish, with their high crime rate, gave us the term "paddy wagon." If their seemingly insoluble problems can evaporate in a couple of generations, then who's to say today's black poor are forever doomed? By showing in so many ways how much has changed, Nicholas Lemann makes a good case that they aren't. □

Lord of the Gadflies

The Nation *is pushy and obnoxious. That's why it's so great.*

by Eric Alterman

In some ways, *The Nation, 1865-1990** is a typical venerable old magazine collection. Its big literary guns of days gone by—Henry James, Mark Twain, D. H. Lawrence, H. L. Mencken—could all be expected to appear in a best of *The Atlantic*. In fact, they do (see Louise Desaulniers's *119 Years of The Atlantic*). The two omnibuses also share a number of America's greatest poets.

So what exactly distinguishes the fiery, self-styled troublemaking weekly from America's oldest and most respectable Boston Brahmin journal? It's not the subject matter; both are dedicated in roughly equal parts to reporting, opinion, and cultural criticism. (*The Nation* publishes no fiction.) Nor are the two magazines necessarily distinguishable by their writers. Both are dedicated to high-minded, literate, liberalism. *The Atlantic* tends to lean rightward from liberal solutions while *The Nation* leans left. Nevertheless, the guts of Robert Reich's recent *Atlantic* cover story on what's wrong with America could easily have run in *The Nation*, had Reich wished to forgo a few thousand dollars.

The primary differences, in truth, are the magazines' individual voices. *The Atlantic* is a dinner party. *The Nation* is a political rally. Oswald Garrison Villard, *The Nation*'s editor from 1918 to 1934, once remarked that he had "never been able to work happily with men or women who are incapable of hot indignation at something or other. To minimize every evil is to my mind to condone it and in time destroy one's influence." This, more than anything, has been *The Nation*'s credo for the past century. It may also

Eric Alterman, a senior fellow of the World Policy Institute, is writing a book on political pundits.

**The Nation: 1865-1990: Selections from the Independent Magazine of Politics and Culture.* Katrina Vanden Heuvel, ed. *Thunder's Mouth Press, $21.95.*

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be the reason that the magazine, along with the segment of the electorate it represents, have been so successfully marginalized during the past two decades.

Part of the problem, of course, is ideological. Americans are distinctly uncomfortable with class-based or collectivist-minded rhetoric. This appears to be the case in the 1990s no less than it was in the 1900s. *The Nation* tries to speak for those who get the rawest deal from society: its poor, its powerless, and its oppressed. These are exactly the folks with whom most law-abiding citizens would like to have nothing whatsoever to do. The political language of solidarity, however much it may be employed on behalf of geopolitical causes comfortably distant from our shores, loses much of its appeal when pitted against individual self-reliance at home.

But the attitude demonstrated by Villard may also provide an important clue to the puzzle. Ronald Reagan gave the impression that he stood with those fire-breathing radicals of the New Right, but deep down, he was quite tolerant of other people's ideas—to the degree that he understood them. He and his wife regularly socialized with unapologetic homosexuals. He even put them up in the White House guest suite. If Oswald Villard had thought that homosexuality was the path to hellfire and damnation, as Reagan seemed to profess, chances are he wouldn't have thrown his friends on the street. He probably would have kept them up arguing all night, overflowing with righteous indignation—but he sure as hell wouldn't have given them his guest bedroom. This may be the reason why Americans seem to take a liking to lovable old reactionaries, such as Reagan and Pat Buchanan, but seem to be frightened by the left-wing equivalents—who mean to convince you that they are right whether or not it kills both of you.

Leftward ho

The Nation is a wonderful collection of some of the most impassioned and powerfully argued American journalism ever to grace a cheaply printed page. One can simply open this collection at random and find something someone wrote half a century ago that is even truer today. Here is Albert Einstein on the 1932 disarmament conference: "As it is, the hardly bought achievements of the machine age in the hand of our generation are as dangerous as a razor in the hands of a three-year-old child." Twenty years later, Nelson Algren reflected on an American Christmas. "Nowhere," he wrote, "has any people set itself a moral code so rigid while applying it so flexibly. Never has any people been so outwardly confident that God is on its side while inwardly terrified lest He be not." The collection also gets the all-time most unlikely contributor award for its reproduction of a June 28, 1925, letter to the editor from a resident of Uffing, Germany, by the name of Adolf Hitler.

More difficult than finding delightful polemics in this anthology is discerning what, if any, influence these pieces have had over the years. Certainly Ralph Nader caused a big stir back in a 1959 issue with his first mention that some American cars might be less safe than advertisers were promising. Hunter Thompson's first piece, on the Hell's Angels, published in 1965, can also be considered one of the more influential articles in the history of modern journalism, for better or worse.

But for most of its adult life, *The Nation* has been forced to sit on the sidelines of American politics. During the height of the Stalinist period, the magazine published more than its share of simple-minded apologies. Ever since, it has suffered in Washington from the impression that its loyalties are somehow less than assured. (The magazine's recent sponsorship of Alexander Cockburn, the world's wittiest and most infuriatingly rigid Marxist journalist, has done nothing to dispel this impression.) Moreover, due to the recent rightward swing of much of the opinion press—most notably at the always *au courant* offices of its primary competitor, *The New Republic*—*The Nation* has earned the reputation in Washington as something of a museum piece, written by bearded Jewish radicals for sixties holdovers and public librarians.

In reading this collection, one gets the impression that there is something more fundamental at work in ensuring *The Nation*'s perennial unchicness and lack of political cachet among movers and shakers in politics and finance: Philosophically, *The Nation* is anti-power. The magazine has no Albert Gore to groom for the presidency, no neoliberal manifesto to put in place once it gets there. Rather, *The Nation*'s political community sees itself picketing outside the room where the decisions are being made, sticking up for the rights of the "permanent minority," whose interests always manage to get screwed when those fellas (and occasionally women) inside divvy up the goodies.

"A magazine shouldn't come to power," explains *The Nation*'s current editor, the bearded Jewish radical Victor Navasky, in the book's afterward. "It can nourish, it can prod, it can hector, it can educate, it can cajole, wheedle, expose, embarrass, inform, illuminate, and inspire." All of this is a recipe for a lousy dinner party. It may even be, at some deeper level, vaguely un-American. But as we slog though the political and cultural dregs of the money/power-worshipping excesses of the Reagan era, it is surely necessary, now more than ever. □

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

The Truth About Chernobyl. Grigori Medvedev. *Basic Books, $22.95.* I will never forget my visit to Three Mile Island. Almost a decade after the accident, the cleanup dragged on. For the most part, it consisted of three men, sucking on respirators and swaddled in protective bunny suits, standing directly on top of the open reactor core. You could watch them via remote video camera.

With the help of nothing more than pairs of fancy pliers attached to the ends of very long poles, they were chipping away at the melted fuel rods and damaged control assembly, piece by radioactive piece. It was a dangerous, dirty, inelegant job. When I interviewed the workers later, they referred to their task as cleaning "the pot." They thought of the core as a toilet bowl; they were cleaning up a very large, very hot mess.

If the Number Two Reactor at Three Mile Island can be thought of as a commode, the Unit Four Reactor at Chernobyl will forever in my mind be "the nuclear volcano" described in Grigori Medvedev's horrifying, bitter, and passionate book about the colossal disaster that occurred on April 26, 1986, on the banks of the Pripyat River in the Soviet Ukraine.

When it comes to nuclear power, I consider myself normal. By that, I mean that I am not hysterical, one way or the other. But Medvedev tells such a tale of bureaucratic incompetence and willful ignorance, a story of such needless death and widespread contamination, it makes me pause. Especially when I think about nuclear power stations dotted across the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Medvedev is in a unique position to tell the story of Chernobyl. A nuclear physicist by training who spent his career generating power in the Soviet Union, Medvedev assisted in the construction of Chernobyl in the early seventies. After the accident, he was sent back to investigate, interviewing many of the operators, turbine engineers, electricians, and firefighters before they died of radiation poisoning. He worked for and knew many of the men who sat at the control panels during the ill-fated test that led to the explosion at Chernobyl.

Medvedev tells his story in a rambling countdown to disaster, beginning with a recollection of the countryside around pre-radiated Chernobyl —a setting of primeval quiet and cleanliness. "I have such fond memories of the Pripyat River!" he writes. "If you stop rowing and scoop up some of the brownish water in your hand, your palm immediately tends to contract on account of the fatty marsh acids in the water. It was those small acids that, after the explosion and the release of radioactive substances, served as efficient coagulators, transporting radioactive particles and fission fragments."

That is Medvedev's style. He writes of the fishermen at the outflow gates of the plant. How big the fish are! How happy the fishermen, who enjoy the vodka and the warm Ukrainian night! And what a whopping dose of radiation they receive!

And so it goes. Characters are introduced and quickly sketched. Their cowardice or heroism during the accident is described. Then Medvedev delivers the obituary. "Of course, he died in great agony in the Number Six clinic in Moscow." (I began to lose track of the people who died in great agony in the Number Six clinic in Moscow.)

Medvedev's book is a Soviet book. It settles scores. The men responsible for the accident are not mere incompetents. To Medvedev they are "pathetic creatures hidden beneath layers of arrogance and official confi-

The Prevalence of Deceit

By **F. G. BAILEY**. We have come to expect lies from politicians, anthropologist F. G. Bailey says, but we are less willing to admit deceit and self-deception as a feature of everyone's life, a necessary part of our social and political systems.

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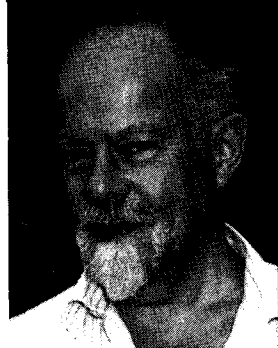

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dence." They are worse than fools. They are "half-crazed" bureaucrats who crack under pressure, who refuse to believe that the reactor core has exploded, despite a plant full of radioactive rubble.

"We did everything right!" screamed the directors of the plant, after sending worker after worker inside the unit to report on the situation.

Anatoly Andreyevich Sitnikov, deputy chief operational engineer, is one of those ordered in to inspect. "The destruction he saw surpassed his imagination. The massive lid of the central hall had been blasted off, and the pathetic remains of the battered concrete walls, their mangled reinforcing bars protruding wildly, looked like some monstrous flycatching plant, waiting for the chance to drag a living creature into its infernal belly. Dispelling this frightful image from his mind, but already feeling the embrace of hot nuclear tentacles on his face, hands, brain, and inner organs, Sitnikov carefully surveyed what was left of the central hall. The reactor had clearly blown up."

Of course, Sitnikov is not believed. Plant officials assure Moscow that the reactor is intact and the radiation levels are normal. Eventually, however, the full extent of the disaster is revealed, but only after men like Sitnikov have received fatal doses of radiation and the people of the towns beside Chernobyl have seen themselves, their gardens, their streets coated in nuclear fallout.

What are the lessons of Chernobyl? Medvedev concludes that the type of reactor used at Chernobyl contained design flaws that led to the explosion. He also blames bureaucratic incompetence and a culture of secrecy and lies. But most of all, Medvedev believes that we forgot to respect the atom. The nuclear fire, Medvedev warns, burns.

—*William Booth*

The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power, and the Pursuit of Office. Alan Ehrenhalt. *Times Books, $23.00.* Now that the ideological fervor of the Reagan years has given way to the gentlemanly pragmatism of the Bush era, political analysts are turning their attention from large questions about the purpose of government to smaller ones about its mechanics. Ten years ago, the two seemed one and the same. Hadn't voters chosen the unmistakably conservative Ronald Reagan because they thought the federal government was too liberal? To serve the apparent will of the people, the federal government slashed taxes, boosted defense spending, and funnelled cash (legally and otherwise) to the Nicaraguan contras. But even before the presidency passed from Ronald Reagan to George Bush, these causes lost their momentum, and the notion of a popular mandate to do any of these things became less compelling. If voters were not determining the course of our democracy, what was?

Ambition was, according to Alan Ehrenhalt, a respected former political reporter for *Congressional Quarterly* who is now executive editor of *Governing* magazine. Ehrenhalt's thesis is that the quirky path of recent political history, from Vietnam to Watergate to Operation Desert Storm, is best understood not by trying to figure out elusive electoral mood swings but by scrutinizing the unsubtle egos of American politicians. The country lacks political direction, he argues, not

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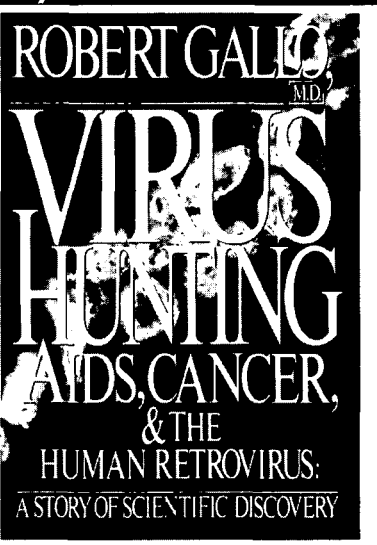

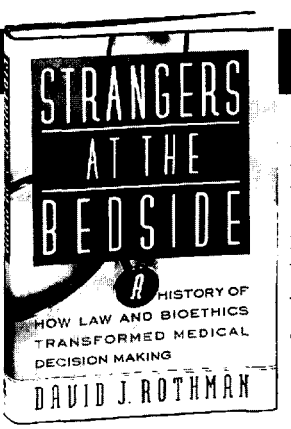

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because voters are ambivalent but because politicians with various political beliefs are tugging it in a hundred different directions at once.

Ehrenhalt lays out his argument through a series of tightly written, chapter-length case studies, beginning at the small-town level and working his way up to Congress and the White House. In each instance, Ehrenhalt shows how a powerful (usually business-dominated) elite that once called the political shots lost its influence as politicians became more independent and assertive.

In Concord, California, a sleepy city government that previously rubber-stamped decisions made by an unelected city manager suddenly turned activist in the eighties with the election of a city council dedicated to instituting "comparable worth" pay. In Greenville, South Carolina, a county government that was formerly the rural fiefdom of a state senator was taken over by fundamentalist Christians bent on restricting sinful development. In Connecticut, the power of state party bosses like Republican J. Henry Roraback and Democrat John Bailey, who at one time exerted absolute control over state legislators, gave way to a statehouse full of independent agents collectively wreaking fiscal chaos. In Congress and the White House, politicians once bound together by loyalty to national political parties went their separate ways, bequeathing to the nation an out-of-control federal deficit.

In every instance, Ehrenhalt argues, change resulted from politicians shedding their status as part-timers and embracing politics as a profession. City and state governments once run by moonlighting lawyers, farmers, and merchants became year-round enterprises, requiring an officeholder's full attention. Ehrenhalt reminds us that, as recently as the fifties, Congress ran from January to July, allowing members "to practice law or sell insurance or do whatever they had done before they were elected." Compare that to last fall, when Congress was kept in session until little more than a week before election day.

Back in the old days, when politicians were distracted by legal briefs or cotton crops, they were more likely to defer to others. But today, the full-time profession of politics attracts ambitious people prepared to give the business of government their full attention. This new breed grew up in a culture less inclined to respect authority; they are also shrewder about using the press, especially TV, to sell their agendas to voters (though Ehrenhalt wisely avoids this subject, which has been discussed to death by others).

Ehrenhalt attributes any number of recent crises to the professionalization of politics, sometimes carrying his argument a bit too far. He contends that the phenomenon is a reason Jim Wright was driven from office, since no countervailing sense of party unity existed to rally unbeholden congressional Democrats behind their speaker. (Actually, I'm inclined to believe the decisive factor was a more aggressive press, which is less inclined than it used to be to ignore ethical lapses in politicians, in part because reporters, too, have less reverence for authority than they once did.) Ehrenhalt also blames the new professionalization for the implosion of Gary Hart's 1988 presidential campaign. Hart, he argues, was encouraged to stray so far from any identifiable constituency that the public ended up wondering who this man really was and developed an unwholesome curiosity about his sex life. "Where's the Beef?" thus led inexorably to "Where's the Salami?"

Well, maybe yes, maybe no. But Ehrenhalt is surely right that the newly professionalized and independent breed of politician has made it difficult to steer the government in any one direction for very long.

What can be done to regain the rudder? Ehrenhalt occasionally comes close to suggesting that we should return to the old days of smoke-filled rooms, but deep down he seems to understand that their time is gone. (He's also sufficiently rigorous in reporting about the way these feudal arrangements worked that the discerning reader isn't likely to wish them back.)

Reformers often suggest that American government could reestablish party loyalty if it were restructured along more parliamentary lines, a change I would certainly support —but which is unlikely to occur any time soon. Short of such major constitutional surgery, governmental torpor can be shed only through an appeal to the idealism, or at least common sense, of the group whose influence on the political process Ehrenhalt chooses not to discuss: the voters.

—Timothy Noah

Unequal Protection: Women, Children, and the Elderly in Court. Lois G. Forer. *Norton, $22.95.* Since the advent of "People's Court," "Divorce Court," and the like, television has provided Americans with a somewhat satisfying image of justice in local trial courts: common-sensical and usually fair. But after 16 years as a trial court judge in Philadelphia, Forer sees institutional justice in a slightly more cynical light. In this book, she reflects on those of her cases in which the law, correctly applied, effected a grave miscarriage of justice. The common thread in these cases is that they involve "the others": women, children, and the elderly.

America's common law—the fabric of court-made rules and practices that has evolved in this country from English roots—is premised on "the reasonable man in the prime of life"; Forer argues that the system fails, sometimes miserably, when it cannot tolerate those who differ from that premise. In cases like these, justice—and judges—must be creative.

Carol was a prostitute and drug courier. Convicted of a drug crime, she was sentenced to a job instead of a jail so that she could continue to provide support for her two small children. One day, Carol showed up in Forer's chambers claiming that her probation officer was seeking sexual favors in return for the good reports she already deserved. Forer knew that any investigation would pit the word of the officer against that of a convicted prostitute—a hopeless match. So in one of the few happy endings in the book, Forer ordered Carol to report to the officer by mail, and she completed her three-year probation successfully.

The stories of children and the elderly are equally compelling. The legal system did nothing for the boy whose divorced parents called him by two different first names and used him as a

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pawn in their struggle against each other. Left without the most fundamental sense of identity, Mitchell/David became even more withdrawn as legal proceedings over his future ensued.

Equally disturbing are the stories of sexually abused kids. Forer shows how the legal system pushes them to testify, at no small personal expense, then often discounts their testimony and returns them to abusive homes. In the section on the elderly, Forer describes poignantly how we force the old to behave in court as if they are in their prime; we do not understand their forgetfulness.

There remains the problem of remedy. Here, Forer is firm and clear: Toleration of difference, and the development of special standards to reflect that difference, is essential public policy. She would, for example, have us develop laws that recognize that women are different—they are often the primary guardian of children, for instance—and that to achieve fair treatment we must give them special treatment. My concern with the case she makes is that special treatment can, and historically has, meant second-class treatment.

One of the hidden messages of this book is that we must fill the seats of justice with wise, creative people. Even in these cases, which present a number of truly unfair and upsetting outcomes, Judge Forer's hand, barely visible because of her modesty, has plainly improved the lives of the litigants before her. Would that there were more like her.

—Lois Schiffer

Virus Hunting: AIDS, Cancer, and the Human Retrovirus: A Story of Scientific Discovery. Robert Gallo. *Basic Books, $22.95.* To the naive reader—if such a person exists—who has never heard of Dr. Gallo's troubles, the title of his book might indicate that it is going to be a swashbuckling story of discovery on the front lines of science. But to those who have followed Gallo's blighted career, it is clear what *Virus Hunting* is going to be. It is going to be an apologia.

AIDS research is a subject exploding with politics and passion. Nearly everyone who researches or even writes about AIDS has been attacked by one interest group or another. Dr. Jerome Groopman of New England Deaconess Hospital still cringes when he recalls AIDS activists who passed out Kool-Aid at one of his lectures several years ago, comparing his recommendation that people with AIDS take the drug AZT to Jim Jones's cyanide solution. I once got several hundred nasty Christmas cards from members of the activist group ACT-UP, with messages like "the blood of people with AIDS is on your hands." A well-regarded scientist at the Food and Drug Administration, Dr. Ellen Cooper, asked to be reassigned this year so that she would no longer have to deal with AIDS drugs—she felt beaten down by the unrelenting pressure from activists, drug companies, and the government. But even in this company, Gallo has suffered more than his share. Perhaps that's why, reading Gallo's book, I kept thinking of Coleridge's lengthy "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in which an old sailor collars a young man and forces him to sit still for his bitter, cautionary tale.

Gallo was attracted to medicine when he was a child, after his sister died of leukemia. But as an adult, he found himself uninterested in, and actually put off by, seeing and treating patients. Instead, he became enmeshed in molecular biology, a science that comes close in its standards and dispassion to physics or chemistry. He began to look for viruses that can cause cancer in humans, focusing on a particular class of viruses that insert copies of themselves among a cell's genes—just like the AIDS virus does.

Gallo's problems began in 1972, when he thought he had made a momentous discovery. He got up at a scientific conference to present his discovery of a virus that can cause human cancer. To his dismay, other scientists at the meeting gleefully informed him that rather than discovering a new human virus, Gallo had isolated animal viruses that had contaminated his cells as they grew in the laboratory. Gallo was so viciously ridiculed, he writes, that the hurt still festers. "Even now, I have difficulty thinking back to that day," he writes, when the joke was "human tumor virus or human rumor virus?"

A decade later, just as Gallo

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regained his standing in the scientific community by finding incontrovertible evidence of that human tumor virus, he became ensnarled in the politics of AIDS.

In the early eighties, Gallo was one of the few scientists who turned their labs over to a search for the new, destructive virus. Having worked on cancer viruses that bear some similarities to HIV, he was ideally situated for the task. And, eventually, he discovered the virus. But so did Dr. Luc Montagnier of Paris's Pasteur Institute. And because one of Gallo's viruses is almost identical to a virus isolated by Montagnier, Gallo has been accused of stealing or misappropriating the virus from the French. He also has been accused of seeking a patent on the antibody test for HIV for his personal gain. And for more than a year, he was pursued by a *Chicago Tribune* reporter, John Crewdson, who deluged Gallo with reams of requests for data, letters, expense accounts, and lab notes and who called almost every scientist in Gallo's field asking for information that would make Gallo look nefarious. Crewdson eventually published a 50,000-word article that accused Gallo of stealing the AIDS virus. Although it never revealed a smoking gun, the article prompted an as-yet-unfinished investigation of Gallo by the National Institutes of Health. While Gallo does not bare his soul in this book, he has said privately to me and many others that he was devastated by Crewdson's zealous investigation.

Many AIDS researchers have similar stories to tell. But Gallo is the field's true Job. That's one reason I wish I could wholeheartedly recommend his book.

I wish I could say that Gallo has finally put all the controversy to rest, closing a particularly unpleasant chapter in his life. I wanted to like his book and to see in it an end, at last, to the ceaseless arguments over who did what and when in the discovery of the AIDS virus. But I found his book slow going, full of details that will not change the minds of those who want to believe he is guilty of stealing the AIDS virus or who dislike his fast-talking, aggressive ways. At the same time, I think the book will baffle and bore those who are not members of the AIDS cognoscenti.

One problem is that Gallo has no gift for writing. His prose is sprinkled with scientific jargon that is certain to confuse the general reader. Who except the most diligent will struggle through sentences like, "As noted, to make viral proteins requires a viral RNA in the form (messenger RNA) and location (cytoplasm) where it can be 'read' or 'translated.' " Even when Gallo writes about incidents that have deeply hurt or enraged him, his prose is almost devoid of passion. He also has larded his book with irrelevancies, like a brief history of the National Institutes of Health and a section on the 13 questions he is most often asked about AIDS.

Those who want to read a juicy tale, full of righteous anger, by a scientist who feels himself persecuted will surely be disappointed. Those who want a primer on viruses will find Gallo's book rough going. But those who are curious about the controversy that envelopes Gallo may want to read his book to learn his side of the story. I wish Gallo success and I fervently hope, for his sake and for the sake of AIDS research, that he will finally be left alone to do his work.

—*Gina Kolata*

Charles Darwin: A New Life. John Bowlby. *Norton, $24.95*. Bowlby's 500-page biography is not the first book to probe Charles Darwin's mysterious illness, which endured for 30 years or more. Authors and scholars have long speculated on the great man's "shivering, dying sensations, ringing in the ears" (to use Darwin's words), his heart palpitations, blurred vision, and hysterical crying fits. Nonetheless, there is something odd about Bowlby's posthumous work. He argues that Darwin's malady was psychological in origin. What, then, was its cause? That's where the oddness lies.

Darwin's malady began when he was 30 years old, shortly after he married his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood, a devoutly religious woman. At almost exactly the same time, Darwin began to read the theories of Lamarck and to speculate upon

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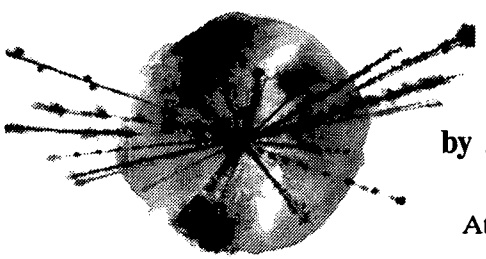

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the "mutability of species," as the idea of evolution was then known.

On learning this, many people reasonably ask: Was Darwin's illness brought on by a conflict between religion and science? Or, perhaps, between his marriage and his work? Or between his own upbringing (he was expected to enter the church at one point) and the implications of the theory of evolution?

Darwin's notebooks reveal that at the very time his illness appeared, he was, as Bowlby writes, "keenly aware that the religious and political implications of his theories could prove dangerous—especially if his philosophical position turned out to be materialist, as he strongly suspected it would." In one notebook Darwin wrote: "Man in his arrogance thinks himself a great work worthy the interposition of the deity. More humble and I believe truer to consider him created from animals." In another revealing entry, Darwin recorded the need "to avoid stating how far I believe in Materialism."

Surprisingly enough, however, Bowlby relegates to an appendix the possibility that this may have caused Darwin's illness. He duly notes the "conflict between what were seen in Darwin's day to be the adverse religious consequences of evolution theory and Emma's religious beliefs," only to dismiss it in a paragraph. Bowlby does not even address the strong possibility that conflict within Darwin's own soul may have been the root of the problem.

As to the allegedly "scant evidence that [Emma] was troubled" by her husband's beliefs, here is what Gertrude Himmelfarb wrote in her book, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*, published in 1959: "It was only in his autobiography that Darwin gave free expression to his religious opinions. And it was when his son prepared to publish the autobiography in the *Life and Letters* that Emma Darwin revealed the true measure of her conventionality. Charles having succeeded in maintaining a modicum of discretion in his lifetime, she objected to having the floodgates of scandal opened after his death, and solemnly warned her son that unless he deleted some of the franker passages, her life would be made unendurably miserable." The son, Francis, "reluctantly agreed to the deletions out of respect for [his] mother's wishes."

These passages remained unpublished until 1958, when Nora Barlow, Darwin's granddaughter, published his autobiography in unexpurgated form. Among the deleted passages was the following gem from Darwin:

"I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true: for if so, the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my father, brother, and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine."

As for the problem of evil, and the difficulty of squaring it with an omnipotent God: "It revolts our understanding to suppose that his benevolence is not unbounded." Himmelfarb dryly notes that Darwin "preferred a morality independent of religion and untainted by the moral defects of Christianity."

Darwin's cousin, Julia Wedgwood, remarked on the curious fact that his antagonism to religion increased "while all the apparent reasons for it were vanishing quantities. . . . He was far more sympathetic with religion when his books were considered wicked by the religious world than when (as was the case for some years before he died) the dignitaries of the Church were eager to pay him the highest honor."

Unfortunately, Bowlby manages to suppress almost all of this, paraphrasing Darwin's views on religion this way: "The Old Testament gave a manifestly false history of the world, and [Darwin] was shocked by the image of God as a revengeful tyrant." Bowlby then misleadingly summarizes Darwin's sentiments by saying, "Yet he was unwilling to move too far from tradition." As Himmelfarb suggests, the truth is that Darwin was actively antagonistic to religion, which in turn plainly dismayed his wife. This may well have churned up Darwin's stomach and given him many restless days and nights. But Bowlby seems to want to keep the lid on all this almost as much as Emma Darwin herself did.

Bowlby has his own theory to offer, a theory hit upon when the biographer learned that Darwin's mother had died when he was eight years old. As it happened, Bowlby discovered this datum when he was working on the psychological ill-effects that sometimes flow from childhood bereavement. (Bowlby, who died in 1990, was also the author of *Personality and Mental Illness, Attachment and Loss*, and *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*.) Sure enough, he discerned a similar etiology in Darwin's case. Darwin's illness, Bowlby concludes, was the result of repressed emotions generated by his mother's death; the noteworthy attacks of the illness can be traced to moments of stress or incidents reminding Darwin of his late mother. Darwin was raised by his older sisters, who did all they could to suppress his memory of her. As a result, Darwin grieved insufficiently for his mother, and paid for this suppression with years of psychosomatic illness.

All this is not so much implausible as uninteresting. Darwin is a historically important figure, and his life is copiously documented. The theory associated with his name continues to draw headlines. The struggle, and conflict, between religion and science is as much an issue now as it was when Darwin was suffering from persistent gastric pains. The psychosomatic origin of much illness, and no doubt Darwin's, is well worth discussing. But precisely because Darwin is so strongly associated with those well-known theories and controversies, we do expect a discussion of any psychosomatic illness he suffered to be related to evolution, or to the issue of religion and science more generally.

If, on the other hand, Darwin's repressed grief really is the true cause of his illness, and that's all there is to it, it is a comparatively insignificant point and scarcely worth bringing up. Bowlby, or his editors, may have realized this, because most of the book is straightforward biography, informative and clearly written (if wholly conventional in its unqualified admiration of Darwin and his ideas). The redeeming feature of the book is that, ultimately, it has very little to do with the author's pet theories about bereavement.

—*Tom Bethell*

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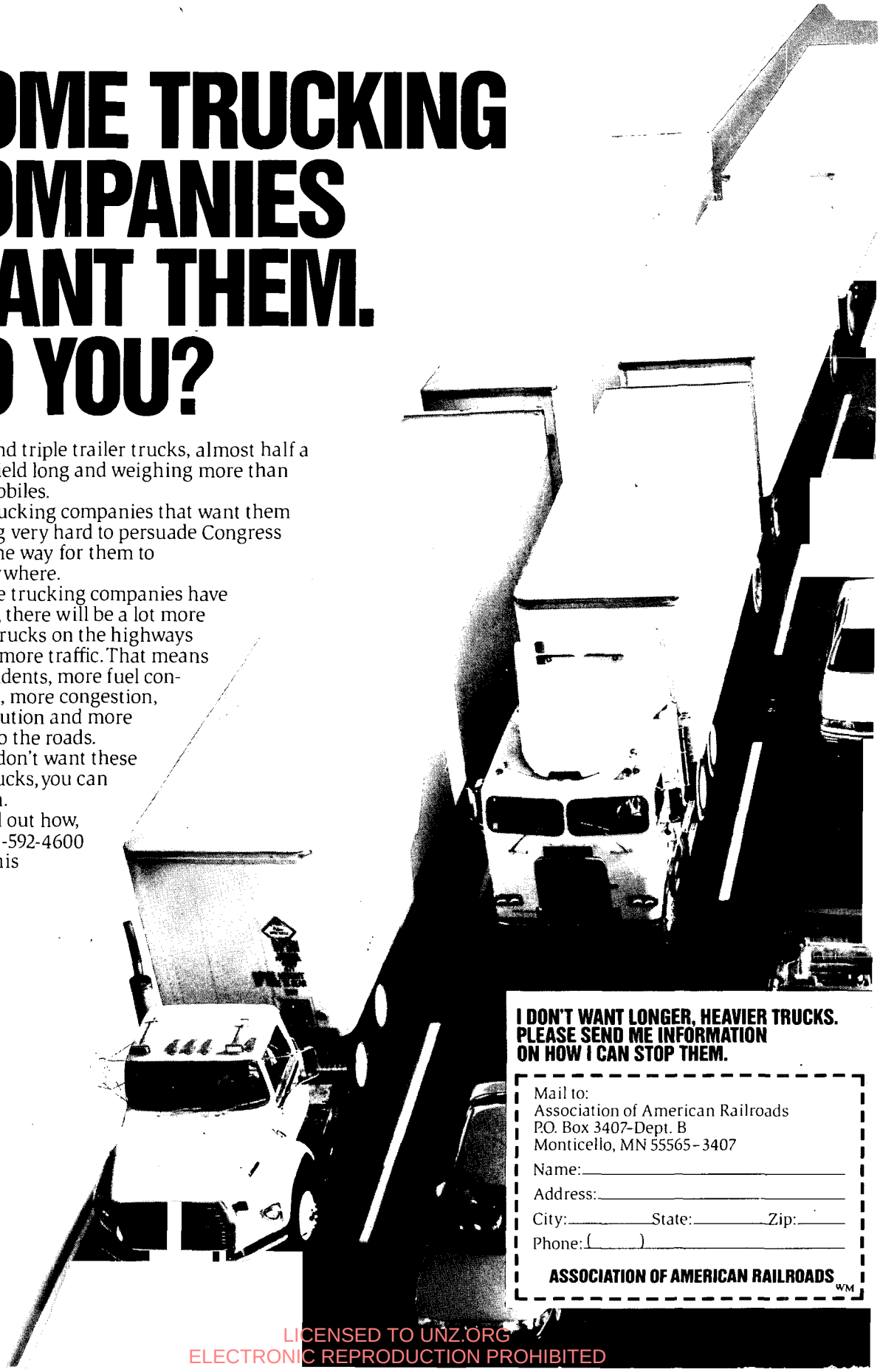

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